

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 178 26 July 2010 30p/80p

For a Workers' Government!

## SAVE THE NHS!

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# “Build solidarity to fight the cuts”

Every year UK trade unionists come together to commemorate the 1834 “Tolpuddle Martyrs”, Dorset farm labourers who were sent to Australia for setting up a union. We will need all of their courage and all of our own solidarity if we are to fight this government.  
Picture: Paul Box/reportdigital.co.uk

**BOB CROW, GENERAL  
SECRETARY RMT, SPEAKING AT  
TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS  
FESTIVAL, JULY 2010**

**W**e are going to see a massive onslaught on working people to pay for the bankers' corruption and greed.

If the government gets away with it, people are going to have their welfare benefits cut, suffer pay freezes, have their pensions taken away from them, be made to work longer. At a time when we should be getting people off the dole queues and into work.

Over the next 18 months we are going to see a workers' fightback. People will start to join the trade union movement because they know the only voice that working people have is the trade unions.

Solidarity and unity [have been] easy words to say. But people are beginning to recognise that all of the gains we have achieved since World War Two — the health service, welfare benefits, decent jobs, decent pay and conditions — are going to be completely eroded, if this government forces its hand.

Solidarity will now mean [something real]. If one group of workers are taking action against austerity cuts and another union is taking action then they should be co-ordinating that action, fighting back against the government.

**Build Trades Councils and local anti-cuts committees**

- Build for a national trade union day of action • Fight every cut • Force Labour councils to defy Tory cuts

NHS

# Sold — to the lowest bidder!

BY TODD HAMER

**G**overnment proposals in the White Paper, *Liberating the NHS*, will bring the NHS in England much closer to a fully privatised healthcare system.

Under this Health Bill, Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts will be abolished. PCTs are currently responsible for spending 80% of the NHS budget. GPs themselves will now directly take on that spending role, become commissioners of all healthcare services; Foundation Trusts will be autonomous institutions that will be allowed to provide private care. The NHS will become little more than a fund, overseen by GPs (or more likely private companies employed by GPs), that buy healthcare services from various private providers.

International private health companies are already salivating at the prospect of winning lucrative NHS contracts.

The end of PCTs and SHAs will result in thousands of job losses (45% of management positions will be axed). Necessary administrative support will now be filled (inadequately) by businesses like Humana, Aetna and United Health. In consultative roles they will provide advice to GPs on where to access the best services. They will also be vying for business as health care providers. The plan is that they will “facilitate” staff in health care centres set up like John Lewis mutual associations.

Despite the promise of real terms spending increases the Lib/Tory government wants to claw back a £20 billion budget deficit by 2014 (a year earlier than previously planned).

Foundation Trusts (groups of hospitals and community services) will be able to raise money by external means. The most obvious way is by increasing the number of private beds. Other ways are allowing women to pay for further fertility treatment in an NHS centre when they have used up the number of IVF cycles available on the NHS and building facilities where treatment is more likely to be financed by insurance com-

panies — e.g. traffic accident trauma centres.

Crucially, Foundation Trusts (there are currently 130 in England, about a third of the total) will now be able to opt out of national bargaining with the trade unions.

The government wants to see the NHS in England turned into the “biggest social enterprise in the world”. Nothing new here though — workers are being asked to oversee and step up their own exploitation.

Like New Labour, the new government justifies privatisation by claiming they are serving “patient choice”. “Patient choice” is in fact embedded in traditional medical ethics, as the principle of “informed consent”. Patients must be told as much as possible about their condition and their treatment options in order to get the most informed consent possible. Short of training every patient in the finer points of medical science, consent and choice will remain limited, but it is a goal that most healthcare professionals aspire towards.

However “patient choice” has now become part of a post-modernist trend that champions patients rather than trained professionals as the experts.

We know confidence in the authority of doctors and other healthcare providers plays an important role in a patient’s recovery. Despite scientific advance, good quality healthcare remains rooted in human relationships and trust between healthworkers and patients. In recent years, both New Labour and the Tories have sought to undermine that trust.

New Labour attempted to introduce outcome measures and targets across the public sector and asked the public to put their trust in their bureaucratic facts and figures. The Tories wish to take this a step further by asking us to place our confidence in the market — competition between service providers will produce the best outcome for you!

New Labour believed in a “managed market” whereas the Tories are for “liberating” the NHS from any management. If a service does not receive

enough referrals, or it is not performing well in the League Tables, then it will go bust. Health Secretary Andrew Lansley has already signalled that “failing” hospitals, GP surgeries and other providers will receive no bailout.

The advocates of free markets argue that state-run healthcare is unnecessarily bureaucratic. But the administration costs of privatised healthcare are many times more than the old-style, bureaucratically-planned NHS. Why?

Health is not very easily commodified. While for example a hip replacement can be easily costed up and sold, treatment for schizophrenia is less easy to measure and package. In many such cases a market in health can only be maintained artificially by a massive bureaucracy which exists to attach arbitrary cash sums to uncommodifiable aspects of health.

For the same reasons marketised health care distorts the services, priorities and values of the health service. When all the most profitable contracts (a quick hip op here, a sports injury there) will have been taken by the private firms, the rump NHS will be left to administer all the least profitable services (the unquantifiable chronic illnesses like schizophrenia).

As cuts begin to be felt, those who can afford to will top-up their care (e.g. get the better state of the art drugs or a fast track operation) and drive down the availability or standard of free care on the NHS.

Eventually the whole principle of free state-of-the-art healthcare will be undermined.

Although it reeks of hypocrisy, Labour’s Shadow Health Minister Andy Burnham has already raised the alarm about this White Paper and pledged to mobilise a campaign against the proposals. Whilst the Lib/Tory proposals are an extension of New Labour’s, the Labour machine may be forced to take a turn towards the trade unions and the grassroots of the movement to defend the NHS as a healthcare provider.

Socialists need to be involved in campaigns to fight a defensive action to save the NHS and to assert a positive alterna-

tive vision. This vision should cut against both the old bureaucratic state-run service and the market-driven system and assert workers’ and patients’ control. “[Healthcare] run from the bottom up, with ownership and decision-making in the hands of professionals and patients” will only be possible with a fully nationalised, state-funded NHS and through a movement to defend the NHS drawing on the expertise, creativity and knowledge of people who work inside it.

## “China is controlled by the capitalists”

“China is basically controlled by the capitalists. All I can do at the moment is speak up for the workers,” declared Qing Tong, formerly one of China’s hundreds of millions of workers who migrate from the countryside to work in big-city factories, but now a writer and able to speak to the *Financial Times* (17 July).

“It seems that the government chooses not to see certain things, so we must keep shouting complaints into their ears non-stop. Only after they hear us will they start seeing.” Qing used to work at Foxconn, the gigantic Taiwanese-owned factory complex with 400,000 workers where iPods and iPads are made.

The *FT* also reports that “Workers in China can join a trade union, but it has to be a branch of the official All-China Federation of Trade Unions, which is affiliated to the Communist Party. In some cases the head of the local union branch is also the factory boss.

“The recent labour unrest has sometimes been as much about protesting against such conflicts of interest in the trade unions as it has been about the management”.

Another migrant worker declares: “We are a new generation of migrant workers — our thinking is different from the last. We want to be treated with respect.”

# Making a killing out of the cuts

From back page

## VEOLIA

**If your local authority doesn’t fancy running its water supply and waste management, it’s probably paying Veolia to do it for them.**

It’s paying them pretty well, too; its 2009 profits were over €580 million. The Veolia Water division is the largest private water company in the world; boss Henri Proglio is also the head-honcho of the French public energy company EDF. He caused controversy by continuing to draw two salaries for a period during his joint tenure. The fact that he is able to operate both posts is a pretty clear indication of the erosion of barriers and distinctions between the public and private sectors in many capitalist states.

Veolia also has a transport division that runs bus, coach and train services across the UK.

In late 2008, two workers at a Veolia facility in Ohio, USA were seriously injured in an explosion. And in 2009,

Veolia was fined £100,000 after a worker at one of their Birmingham facilities suffered a near-fatal fall. But a lack of concern for basic health and safety is characteristic for companies like Veolia.

## UNITED LEARNING TRUST

**ULT is the single-biggest sponsor of academy schools in the UK, currently running 17.**

It was formed in 2002 as a subsidiary of the United Church Schools Trust. Many of the academies it runs retain a strong religious ethos. ULT stands to gain substantially from the ConDem coalition’s Academy plans.

ULT management of existing academies has led to drops in both standards and workplace rights. The aggressively target-driven business models ULT use to run their schools have led to a culture of bullying developing in many academies, with a bullying headteacher at one ULT academy in Walthamstow being forced to resign following a staff campaign protesting their behaviour.

ULT is also famous for its eagerness to bring big business into the classroom, working closely with a number of high-profile corporate sponsors to develop workplace-focused learning for children, more-or-less explicitly designed to teach working-class kids to be efficient and obedient proletarians.

## PEABODY

“Social landlord” Peabody is a sector-specific provider, taking over the running of housing authorities. They now manage nearly 20,000 homes across London.”

Since taking over the Pembury estate in Hackney residents have complained about Peabody’s lack of accountability and the lack of any proper channels for residents to communicate effectively with the company. They have also failed to improve the estate’s ailing facilities. As one resident put it in 2005, “If any other estate is being asked to transfer, tell them to vote ‘No’. It’s a con.”

## Best wishes to Pat

**Our long-time comrade Pat Longman is seriously ill in hospital in Nottingham.**

**We know she has been keenly reading *Solidarity* so we thought we would send her our regards and best wishes and we know our readers will share these sentiments.**

**Sustain the fight!**

NEW ANTI-CUTS COMMITTEES

# The cuts are not inevitable!

**The Lib/Tory government plans to make many of its cuts by chopping finance for local councils. Local councils, including Labour councils, are now preparing to pass on that cut, axing jobs and services. And committees to fight those cuts and Lib/Tory cuts in welfare are now being set up in areas across Britain.**

Local Trades Councils are the best bodies to initiate such committees — anti-cuts campaigns need to have the local labour movement at their heart. If committees are initiated outside trade-union structures, for example by community groups, they should move to link up with the labour movement, winning affiliations and delegates from trade unions.

The committee must, however, be broader than the Trades Council, drawing in delegates from community groups, ward and constituency Labour Parties, and workplaces, as well as trade unions.

These cuts will affect the whole working class, not just public sector workers — parents who rely on local nurseries, carers who will lose allowances as disabled people lose benefits, and anyone who enjoys visiting the local library, the one that is about to close.

The campaigns need to be open and democratic, accessible to all activists who want to contribute.

*The committee's aim should be simple: to fight every cut in jobs and services.*

A first task of an anti-cuts committee could be to audit the effect of the threatened cuts in its area. Who uses this service? Why is that service important? People using the service should be approached to get involved.

The key thing is to get out to the working class — organise regular stalls in shopping centres, outside big workplaces.

Demonstrations, lobbies of the council, workplace meetings, and support for industrial and community direct action against cuts, will also be part of the committee's work as it develops.

All of this requires left activists, who will be fully involved in these committees to throw off habitual ways of organising — big “top tables”, limited time for discussion, speeches which do not engage with the actual problems facing working-class people. These campaigns need to be attractive to new activists.

But these committees will also be an opportunity for the whole left to work together to an extent not seen in recent years. The necessity of organising a lot of urgent practical activity may engender a certain “discipline”. That does not mean political disagreement — for such problems as the reformism of the Socialist Party and the opportunism of the Socialist Workers Party — will disappear. They won't. Nonetheless “left unity” is



made necessary by the urgency of the class struggle.

These committees must also be a pressure on the “official” labour movement. The TUC has now promised to organise a demonstration on 19 October, the eve of the government's Strategic Spending Review, when the next round of detailed Lib/Tory cuts will be made. It should not be a trek around Westminster by full-time officials.

The 19 October should be made into a proper “day of action” including a mass labour movement demonstration. If the leaders won't lead, then the rank and file must.

In some meetings to set up these committees, there has been debate about the proper relation between them and council Labour groups.

If council Labour groups call for “unity against the Lib/Tory government”, that is fine. But the question has to be: unity to do what? Behind that is the question: will Labour councils and councillors fight the Tories — can they be made to do it?

Committees should welcome delegates from council Labour groups. But they should take their own deci-

sions, based on the needs and wishes of the workers and community groups they represent, and measure what the councillors do by the needs of the struggle against the government.

They should organise to make Labour councillors refuse to cooperate with the cuts. If council Labour groups carry out Lib-Tory cuts, then the committees must fight them. Dissident Labour councillors who fight the cuts will be important and useful assets to our campaigns.

Some of the new committees are a good start to the fight against the cuts — and look capable of developing into what we desperately need — democratic working class organisations which will help shake the trade union movement out of its frozen inertia of the last 13 years and more. We must convince working-class people that these cuts are not inevitable.

- Fight every cut;
- Set up labour movement anti-cuts committee everywhere;
- Build for a labour movement day of action;
- Force Labour councils to defy Tory cuts.

IAN TOMLINSON

# Another state cover-up

**The Crown Prosecution Service has decided that no charge will be brought against the policeman who killed newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson as he was passing by the 2009 protests against a G20 meeting in London. Tomlinson was struck from behind by a riot police officer, and pushed to the ground. Tomlinson was helped to his feet by demonstrators, not by his attackers. He recovered and continued walking, but then collapsed after 100 metres and subsequently died.**

Though it was the unprovoked assault on him by a policeman that precipitated his death, the British state refuses to accept responsibility for this death. Tomlinson's death would not have been investigated at all, had it not been for the determined campaigning of his family and of G20 activists who witnessed his killing. We should refuse to let the police off the hook!

The official line is that medical opinion differs as to whether there was a direct causal link between the

attack and Tomlinson's death. That is shameful evasion. Controversial medical evidence — the findings of a pathologist who conducted the first post mortem has been criticised — can always be tested in court.

And is a dispute over medical evidence even relevant? Is it okay for a policeman to knock someone down with a baton and then stand by while he struggles to get to his feet? What the state is now in effect saying is that it is.

Six months have elapsed since Tomlinson was killed. It is now too late they say to bring a court case! Ian Tomlinson's family — who say they have been kept in the dark by the authorities for an entire year — have a good idea of what the real reason is. His stepson Paul King says: “It's a cover-up”.

Cover-ups happen all the time. Every year, dozens of people in the UK die in police custody (or as a result of other forms of contact with the police). Not one single police officer has ever been charged. Was every single one of those hundreds of death an accident? No. In

practice, the police operate beyond the rule of law — violent assault at the hands of the police is always deemed to be “justifiable force.”

But the CPS decision has caused a debate among politicians and in the media. A public enquiry has been announced. The Metropolitan Police have said the riot police officer involved will face disciplinary charges, but these bureaucratic processes may yet be a way, as they have been in the past, for the state to evade responsibility and exonerate the cop. Continued political campaigning could stop that.

Greater control and accountability over the police force is part of the answer, but it is an issue which we need to debate in the labour movement, especially as the government introduces directly elected police and crime commissioners. In the meantime, we should remember how the capitalist state moves to protect its own interests and why we need to fight hard against each and every injustice meted out by the servants of the state.

# Civil service union gears up for action

BY A CIVIL SERVANT

**O**n 23 July I attended a PCS anti-cuts campaign briefing meeting. The 35 attending delegates consisted of activists from all of the principal governmental bargaining units, along with their full-time officials.

The meeting was held to inform branch officers about key recent recommendations of our National Executive and dates for activities and demonstrations (both PCS and TUC sponsored initiatives).

Our Assistant General Secretary Chris Baugh told us that the immediate priority of the union was to get Parliamentary support from an “unholy” combination of nationalist parties, Labour and Lib-Dem rebels, combined with a letter-writing campaign to local MPs, in order to defeat the the government’s attack on our redundancy compensation scheme.

Other issues highlighted were:

- our union’s alternative economic proposals (Tax Justice Campaign and arguments for greater public investment)
- building up trades councils and anti-cuts campaigns
- the need to recruit and strengthen workplace branches.

The TUC have now called a lobby of Parliament on 19 October and regional “days of action” on 22 and 23 October.

The PCS is calling a Cuts Conference on 6 November and a “mass” demonstration in the spring.

More importantly, Baugh stated that the Executive would meet in September, after sounding out the membership, to discuss tactics and strategy around national industrial action.

Delegates raised the issue of a pressing need for a strike levy, if strikes are to be open-ended and designed to win. Baugh said that would be discussed by the Executive in September: “there was a definite need to build up a ‘campaigns and disputes fund’, but difficulties could arise in the logistics of the levy. Would it be £1 extra from subs or a voluntary/workplace levy?”

Other delegates stressed the need to prepare for attacks from the High Court over balloting for industrial action, and the need to make sure that legal requirements for balloting were carried out.

Questions were also raised about the pay scales of the Executive (the highest PCS full time salary is over £80,500), especially if the membership were to be levied for a disputes fund. Unfortunately Comrade Baugh had left the meeting by this stage.

The PCS is now on a war footing. The union, nationally and regionally, is re-organising its structures; strengthening ties between branch reps and national organisers, refocusing its training initiatives towards lobbying, politicising, developing town committees and trade councils, public speaking and dealing with media, as well as generating anti-cuts propaganda for both membership and the public. The structures are in place, or at least are being developed, it is now for the rank-and-file to mobilise.

# BA workers reject latest offer

BY DANIEL RANDALL

**B**ritish Airways workers have rejected the latest offer from BA bosses in their long running dispute over pay and work restructuring.

Minor concessions on pay were on offer but no significant promises on the original work-related issues of the dispute or the attacks workers have suffered during their campaign. While the deal did promise no victimisation of workers currently involved in disciplinary cases, it only offered a partial reinstatement of the staff travel allowance rescinded during the strike which many workers came to see as the key frontline attack.

The press have stated surprise at the result. It was assumed BA workers had

no stomach for a continued fight.

However, the turnout was significantly lower than previous ballots and this might reflect a falling level of morale.

The failure of the workers’ union, Unite, to offer any real industrial leadership can’t have helped — they gave no recommendation on the offer, public statements continue to be couched in the language of reconciliation and accommodation. This, despite the intransigence and belligerence of BA bosses.

Management have spun the low turnout to imply that the high number of workers who either voted for the deal or didn’t vote at all represents an effective majority in support of accepting the offer. This is, of course, nonsense — if most workers didn’t vote all, that hardly represents a ringing endorsement of Willie Walsh’s miserly offer.

But rejection of the deal opens the door

to further strikes, which may take place in September pending a ballot. Does enough stamina remain to strike again? Certainly Unite could do more to enthuse, galvanise and embolden its members. Rather than letting Walsh set the tone, it should go on the offensive against his project for British Airways.

They must also begin to mobilise other aviation workers rather than allowing sectional chauvinisms to go unchallenged. If the cabin crew are defeated, it is almost certain that Walsh will go after some other section of BA workers next.

The dispute has cost British Airways an estimated £150 million plus so far. Some BA shareholders must be wondering whether Walsh’s ideological dedication to smashing the cabin crew union will end up costing the company more than it’s worth.

# London cleaners win living wage

BY IRA BERKOVIC

**I**SS, the last cleaning contractor operating on London Underground to refuse to pay its workers the London Living Wage (£7.85), has finally caved in, meaning that all cleaners on the Underground will now be paid at least that amount.

Cleaning workers are amongst the most exploited in the capital, facing not only low pay but constant intimidation and bullying from management, including having their often-precarious immigration statuses used against them to keep them in line. Their years-long

struggle has seen them organise and take action in a way that conservative forces in the labour movement claimed low-paid, migrant workers were incapable of, and has inspired activists from a range of movements to become involved with labour movement struggles.

Cleaners’ struggles are by no means over, though, as casual (and not-so-casual) exploitation is still rife on the Underground, and because £7.85 — while a distinct improvement on the pitiful minimum wage — is still a very difficult wage to live on (much less support dependants) in London.

# Job cuts fight on Underground

**T**he RMT union is currently balloting London Underground workers for industrial action over proposed job cuts.

800 station staff jobs are threatened, which would have an enormous knock-on effect across the entire tube network. Understaffed stations have incredibly dangerous potential consequences for workers and passengers alike, and the measures are a further indication of LUL management’s dedication to cutting any

corner possible to save money.

LUL also claims to be currently employing 300 more drivers than it needs, and the union has reported a significant increase in sackings for trivial offences. This certainly indicates that drivers will be the next grade to be hit if the bosses are allowed to get away with this first round of cuts; LU workers and their supporters must resist them. The ballot closes on 11 August.

# Neo-liberals beat the regulators

**“A**fter the financial crisis”, in 2008, noted John Authers in the *Financial Times* of 16 July, “it was beyond argument that existing regulations had failed, and would need to be rethought.

“Only a few months ago, it looked as though the Great Re-regulation might turn into a Great Revenge, as politicians planned to squeeze the banks”.

In the last few months, inertia, the huge political and social power of high finance, the absence of an energetic lobby-group within the wider capitalist class for a definite scheme of “re-regulation”, and the leanings of most political leaders, have won out.

The Lib-Con government in Britain is not untypical. Governments are seeking an aggressively neo-liberal path out of the crisis: more privatisation, more “marketisation”, more union-bashing, lighter taxes on the rich and business,

“light-touch” regulation of banks, and having nationalised banks run as if they were private.

Even the US government, which unlike European government opposes rapid deficit reduction, has taken a neo-liberal choice through the mildness of its recent huge new law on financial regulation.

“Now, for the banks”, commented Authers, “it begins to look like a Great Escape.

“A number of issues have been decided this week, and all largely in the interests... of banks and their shareholders”.

The *FT*’s Lex column agreed:

“Banks had reason to cheer. Congress finally passed a bill far less onerous than feared a year ago... By-and-large modern banking will look the same in five years’ time as it did pre-crisis...”

That means new crises like that of 2008 are possible, and indeed even probable, in the decades to come.

## IN BRIEF

### Regrading fight

**N**orthants County UNISON called a meeting against the cuts on Thursday 22 July.

This meeting was one of six such countywide meetings in response to a regrading exercise conducted by Northants County Council which has resulted in hundreds of low paid council workers being downgraded and facing significant pay cuts.

Northants County Council have used the Single Status Agreement, which is supposed to raise the pay of mainly women workers who have been victims of pay discrimination, to actually slash the wages of low paid workers, many of whom are women.

Unison are now looking at the legalities of the pay cuts and strike action is now being mooted.

### Harwich port strike

**R**Mt members at Harwich International Port are set to begin a series of non-consecutive industrial actions over pay and conditions this week.

Two strike dates have been set so far with port operatives and support staff walking out for 24 hours from 6pm Thursday 29 July and again one week later from 6pm Tuesday 10 August.

The strike will involve more than 100 dockers and will affect services to Holland and Denmark.

RMT members at Harwich were hit by a pay freeze last year and have been made what Bob Crow described as “a totally unacceptable offer” this year.

### Health and safety campaign

**T**he Hazards Campaign has launched a national “We didn’t vote to die at work” campaign.

The campaign says, “We need to fight against: the deregulation of health and safety law; the misrepresentation of health and safety as silly, unnecessary, red tape instead of our human right... ‘We didn’t vote to die at work’ posters have proved very popular.”

• [www.hazardscampaign.org.uk](http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

# Force Labour councils to defy cuts

BY MARTIN THOMAS

**T**he Lib/Tory government plans to make many of its cuts by chopping finance for local councils.

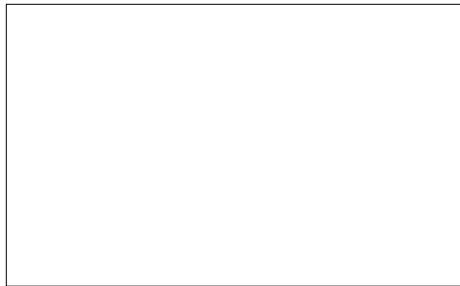
About 60% of councils' income comes from central government (about 25% from council tax, and the other 15% from rents, fees, charges, etc.), and the government plans to force a freeze on council tax rates in April 2011 budgets.

What will Labour councils do? Some have been chopping away for years, under New Labour government, and are moving fast for bigger cuts to accommodate the new central government policies.

Neath Port Talbot council in South Wales, for example, has demanded big cuts in overtime pay and allowances — and threatened to sack all 7000 council staff, and re-employ them on worse terms, if they don't agree.

What about Labour councillors who say they want to join anti-cuts campaigns and fight the Tories?

We should demand that they refuse to carry out or co-operate with the cuts. Labour councillors should do what Poplar Labour council, in East London, did in the 1920s; what Clay Cross council, in Derbyshire, did in the early 1970s; and what several Labour councils talked about doing, but never properly carried through, in the mid-1980s: They should use the council as a platform to mobilise



Learn the lessons of the 1980s

the local unions and working-class communities to defend and improve social provision.

It will be a hard fight to push any Labour council into doing this.

Local government is more undemocratic than it was, with the new "executive mayor" or "cabinet" systems. Councillors get more money. In Islington council, in London, for example, every councillor got over £10,000, the council leader £48,000, and seven other leading councillors £35,000 each, in 2008-9.

Labour Party life and democracy has withered, so that very few councils have an active, energetic local Labour Party pushing them to take a stand.

In the early 1980s, several Labour councils first responded to Tory cuts by raising rates (local taxes) rather than cutting services. That option has been closed off by the Tory council-tax freeze. Central government also controls more of councils' income than it used to.

The government has greater legal powers to intervene if it considers a council's policy "irresponsible", and to impose commissioners to run the council instead.

In 1986-7 Labour councillors from Liverpool and from Lambeth, south London, were surcharged and disqualified from office. They were punished, in fact, not for running illegal budgets, but for delay in making any budget at all in the 1985-6 financial year, i.e. for irresponsible gestures towards a fight against central government cuts.

Subsequent defeats mean that those penalties are seen as the result of fighting cuts, not as a result of being irresponsible about fighting cuts.

All those factors exist. But the stakes now are bigger than they were in the 1980s. From the start, in anti-cuts campaigns, socialists should be arguing unequivocally that the right thing for Labour councils to do is to defy the cuts and help mobilise the local unions and working-class communities. To do otherwise is to concede half-defeat in advance.

If that argument — and mobilisation around that argument in unions, tenants' groups, and so on — pushes even a few Labour councillors here and there to take a principled stand against cuts, those councillors can play a big role in the battle, as individual left-wing councillors did in many areas in the 1980s.



Not our friend

TRADE UNION CONGRESS

# No place for Cameron or Cable!

BY DAN KATZ

**A**t its June meeting the TUC General Council decided to invite David Cameron to speak to the TUC Congress in September.

The Cameron invitation was announced to the General Council by TUC secretary Brendan Barber, without prior notice to most Council members.

Billy Hayes of the CWU and Paul Kenny of the GMB immediately supported Barber. Apparently so did PCS left-winger Janice Godrich.

Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union and Tony Burke of Unite objected, but the invitation went through.

Bob Crow of the RMT (which is not represented on the General Council) threatened to lead a walkout if Cameron spoke, and several other unions passed resolutions opposing the invitation. Even Dave Prentis, the right-wing leader of Unison and ex-President of the TUC, was also rumoured to have opposed the invitation and his pressure may well have contributed to Cameron's climb-down.

Subsequently Cameron turned down the invitation, but he must still be laughing in contempt at the weakness of the unions' leaderships. He has announced massive attacks on workers' living standards and the official union movement fails to respond with demonstrations and strikes but do... invite him to speak at their conference!

Now the TUC has invited Lib Dem Business Secretary Vince Cable to speak instead — someone whose capitalist credentials are almost as impeccable as Cameron's.

Unfortunately opposition to him will be less sharp, as the Lib Dems are not seen so straightforwardly as a party of business.

But Cable has no place at our movement's congress where we should be preparing to fight his Tory-Liberal government!

This sad story does reveal one further general problem for any activist interested in finding out what the TUC is doing: the decision-making process is thoroughly opaque. The TUC should produce minutes of its meetings; decisions should be made by recorded votes. Individual unions should make their representatives on the General Council accountable through mandates and written reports, available to members promptly following each meeting.

Activists from the RMT have organised an e-petition, available to sign at <http://www.petitionbuzz.com/petitions/no2coalitionattuc/>.

## “We need to tell people cuts are not inevitable”

**Andy Walker is a Labour councillor in Redbridge, east London. He spoke to Martin Thomas.**

**MT:** The coalition government is relying on Labour councils to carry out a lot of the cuts for it. How should Labour councils respond?

**AW:** There needs to be a major campaign against the cuts, that makes the point that it's an ideological attack. We do have the money to spend on public services, it's a question of political will. The Tories are being very clever at pretending there's no alternative, but we don't need to spend billions on Trident or have troops in Afghanistan. There are also wealthy people who could afford to pay more in taxation. It'd be a bold, brave council that wants to go down that path of campaigning. I hope some Labour groups might want to.

**MT:** If even a few Labour councils refused to comply with cuts, and mobilised unions and communities to stop them, it would have a huge effect.

**AW:** I wouldn't advocate any councils working to illegal budgets, because that could imply councillors losing their homes. But a vigorous campaign against the cuts is perfectly legitimate.

**MT:** The question of illegality doesn't arise immediately, though. Councils have leeway in the budgeting and they don't have to make new budgets until 2011. It's possible for them to build up movements where they could simply refuse to impose cuts, and force the government to take on whole commu-

nities if they want to push cuts through.

**AW:** I think you have to be very careful about how far you want to push it.

**MT:** You're a Labour councillor in a Tory-Lib Dem council. What role do you think Labour groups and Labour councillors should play in councils when they're in opposition?

**AW:** We still have a duty to look to educate the trade unions and the wider community about the political nature of these cuts. They're not inevitable; they're calculated to benefit the wealthy at the expense of the rest of us.

**MT:** In some areas, anti-cuts committees are already being set up by Trades Councils and local trade unions. Do you think Labour councils and local Labour Parties should play a role in establishing these?

**AW:** That's a great idea.

**MT:** Over the last decade, we've seen a decline of Labour Party democracy, including a deterioration of the levels of control local labour movements are capable of exercising over council Labour groups, and a deterioration of local democracy generally. What measures would you advocate to combat that?

**AW:** My view is that it stems from Tory anti-union laws. People used to get together in the workplace to discuss political issues. For me, democracy is about democracy in the workplace. It's not about putting a cross on a ballot paper every five years.

By weakening the trade unions so

severely, the Tories had an impact on wider democracy in the Labour Party because people just aren't engaged in political culture. There are fewer people in schools and workplaces talking about politics. Active trade union membership has shrunk. With one or two exceptions the unions have become very top-down and passive. There are less and less people prepared to talk about politics at a grassroots level.

We can turn it around, but we need to have an analysis of why there is so much apathy.

I was disappointed that John McDonnell didn't get onto the ballot paper in the Labour Party leadership election; he offered the most believable way of re-politicising the working class through his work trying to win back some of the rights the Tories snatched away from us.

**MT:** One of the main issues you've campaigned on is housing. What measures do you want to see the Labour Party committed to?

**AW:** The right to buy has got to go. It's been so disruptive to communities. Most houses are bought by a landlord, so instead of those houses going to someone locally who needs accommodation it just goes to whoever can pay the highest rent. That could be someone from another borough or indeed from anywhere in the country. It fuels grievances and people are unhappy about it. It's a key reason why the BNP has had some success.

We need to move towards a substantial house building programme, otherwise these problems are going to continue. I'm advocating that Labour groups put together a costed plan for a significant number of new-build houses, with gardens. We need to lobby the leadership for that policy to be taken up.



# Tenants and parents, old and new faces, action plans and Labour councillors

## Lambeth

A hundred workers, council tenants, parents, service-users and pensioners protested outside Lambeth council's "Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee", at very short notice, on 19 July. (Children and Young People's Services are the sharp end of the Labour council's cuts programme, set to lose £20 million over two years.)

Lambeth council is pushing through cuts, privatisation and anti-working class measures independently of the Tory cuts, and was doing so long before the election..

Some of their measures do not even pretend to save money. All the workers (but none of the senior managers) in the borough's One O'Clock Clubs are being sacked and forced to reapply if they want new jobs. This will save no money whatsoever: what it will do is disrupt a much valued service for young children, but also remove an inconvenient nest of trade union strength, where density is almost 100 percent, paving the way for cuts later.

In the period ahead, every Labour councillor will have to choose between "respectable" collaboration with the Tories and the interests of the working-class communities they claim to represent. In the case of Lambeth, the council's record suggests they will not choose the latter unless subjected to unbearable pressure from below. Let's build that pressure!

From [lambethactivists.blogspot.com](http://lambethactivists.blogspot.com)

## Barnet

Barnet is becoming notorious, first for Future Shape/easyCouncil, now for the great councillors' allowances hike, the charge being led by GLA member and Barnet councillor Brian Coleman, the second highest paid councillor in the country, we now learn.

When Barnet residents tried to ask a question at a "Residents' Forum" about the council Leader and Cabinet voting

themselves 55-99% allowances increases last week they were told they weren't allowed.

The council is pushing local schools to apply for Academy status, there were 18 lining up at the last count. Most of the council services are being "bundled up" for privatisation. Sheltered housing wardens are likely to face the axe soon - the council had to put that cut off for one year due to a lively political and legal campaign led by elderly residents.

The trades council was revived in 2008. This summer we are putting in place plans for a big Barnet Public Services Alliance meeting on 23 September. We hope to repeat the success we had in 2008 when we organised a public and staff meeting about Future Shape that drew 300 people.

We now have three regular sites for street stalls in Finchley Central, High Barnet and Burnt Oak, and hope to add to these as more people get active.

At the same time Barnet Anti Academies Alliance has been set up - this is concentrating efforts on informing staff, parents and governors at one of the local secondaries and is putting together a newspaper to distribute at schools at the start of term.

• [www.barnettuc.org.uk/](http://www.barnettuc.org.uk/).

Vicki Morris

## Camden

Camden Trades Council called an anti-cuts campaign meeting on 12 July, attended by about 100 people. The meeting did not set up a continuing anti-cuts committee, but it looks as if that will eventually be set up.

Unfortunately nothing seemed to have been done to inform school NUT groups about the meeting.

Unfortunately also speakers offered a restatement of what the audience already knew about the cuts and the Government being bad, plus a plug for that speaker's particular "thing".

Only two rank-and-file activists from local unions other than Unison could get in.

There was a debate on whether or not to have "unity" and a "coalition against the cuts" with the Labour Party which controls the council.

The nearest thing to a debate was the responses from the floor to the speech by Labour. Hugo Pierre, a Unison activist and SPER, responded well, saying that no-one should prejudge the Labour council as the enemy, but the council should join with unions and community groups to fight the cuts instead of carrying them out.

It is important for activists to go into these meetings with a specific written proposal for how a committee should be set up and what initial activities it should do.

• <http://camdentradescouncil.org.uk>

Martin Thomas

## Nottinghamshire

More than 50 people attended a meeting on the cuts called by Nottinghamshire Trades Council on 14 July. There were many "new" faces at the meeting and people came to directly report recent cuts and issues in their

Union activists need inspiring

**"Our job is to clean the dust out of the eyes of working people who create the wealth, so we can enjoy that wealth"**

By PAUL HOLMES, SECRETARY  
KIRKLEES UNISON, SPEAKING AT  
IDEAS FOR FREEDOM

**What we've got at the moment is union activists who need inspiring. They're worn down. Any public sector official will tell you it's almost impossible to win grievances. The employer always has the upper hand.**

The mantra for the last six months has been to say that the crisis is so monumental as to justify any cuts. But there's no need for any cuts - there's £160 billion of unpaid taxes. Let's increase the number of people working at the Inland Revenue to collect those taxes. But instead, HMRC has outsourced all its own buildings to a firm in the Bahamas so they don't have to pay tax on it! You can't make this stuff up. But we have to tell the truth.

At this moment in time the working class are frightened, but they're angry. We need to tap into that anger and build a fightback against what's going

on. We need to tell them the truth of what's going on. That's why you can't get on ballot papers or on the television.

They want to wind back the clock, and working people are frightened. And when working people are frightened, if they don't have something to aspire to, they look backwards to what they thought was a better time.

In some respects, it was a better time in the 60s and 70s - we had full employment. You could walk out of your job and into another one. Lads at the pit who'd been badly treated could get a job at another pit. There isn't another pit now.

The job of the media is to confuse the majority of us who are working people so that the 5% who rule can carry on ruling. Our job is to clean the dust out of the eyes of working people who create the wealth, so they can enjoy that wealth.

• Kirklees council has admitted that it plans £250 and £400 million cuts over the next five years. A local campaign has been set up: <http://kirklees-sos.org>

workplaces, including victimisation cases as well as redundancies.

The meeting voted to set up an anti-cuts committee and called a local conference of shop stewards and activists to coordinate action and solidarity after the summer.

Tom Unterrainer

## Merseyside

Merseyside TUC launched a Merseyside Public Sector Alliance at a meeting of over 100 this month.

The meeting adopted an action plan which included establishing delegate-based committees across Merseyside to be co-ordinated through trades councils, organising a demonstration outside Lib Dem conference, booking a train to the TUC demonstration on 19 October, as well as planning some action to co-ordinate with the European Day of Action (26 September).

## Southwark

Peter John, Southwark's Labour Council leader, wouldn't say anything concrete about the cuts at Southwark TUC's meeting about the cuts on Monday 19 July.

However, the latest *Southwark News* says the Council expects a £76 million cut in central government funding. The current council budget is £319 million, 75% of which comes from central government. An anti-cuts group is expected to be set up soon.

## Lewisham

Mayor of Lewisham Sir Steve Bullock showed his contempt for

anti-cuts campaigners at a Council meeting on 14 July when he called us "fucking idiots". 100 activists, demanding no cuts to jobs or services, attended the protest organised by the local NUT.

Bullock went on to approve £2.75 million of cuts for this year - but there is much more to come in November.

A range of deeper cuts, including the closure of five libraries and at least one early childhood centre plus slashing jobs across all the council's departments, are also being considered for implementation over the next three years.

Later Bullock said he had left his microphone on while making an aside. He added, "The idea that Lewisham Council can decide that we won't make any cuts while the rest of Britain is having its public services reduced by 25 per cent is nonsense."

A modest-in-size but productive meeting on 27 July set up a Lewisham Anti-cuts Alliance, bringing together the trades council and campaign groups. The new group plans regular stalls, organising meetings and demonstrations.

Lewisham Mayor Steve Bullock has contempt for campaigners

• Local campaigns have also been set up in Leeds, Tower Hamlets, Swansea, North Staffordshire and Newcastle. Send us your reports: [solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

# Help us fight new Academies in Southwark

BY FLORENCE MENSAH

The two Southwark secondary schools that are not yet Academies are set to become guinea-pig Gove academies. Workers and parents need your help. Trade union organisers within one of these schools have been subject to unnecessary and draconian persecution for trying to build up a genuine response from staff to this crazily rushed and ill-considered legislation. They want to intimidate workers from speaking out against conversion to new-style Academy status. Staff should not be intimidated for opposing Gove, defending our jobs and fighting to maintain community-based comprehensive education. The intimidation should not be allowed divide and conquer staff and parent opinion. Please support us in our fight!

- Southwark anti-Academy campaign public meetings: St Thomas More Hall, 116a Lordship Lane, East Dulwich SE22 8HD, 7.30pm, Wednesday 8 and 15 September.
- Also meeting every Wednesday evening in August, Magdala pub, 211 Lordship Lane.

## HOW TO FIGHT

# We need to challenge the union leaderships and link up with the community

An hourly paid ESOL teacher at Hackney College reflects on an ongoing fight to save jobs

Earlier this year 68 members of staff at Hackney Community College were threatened with redundancy. After two successful, solid strike days, negotiation and many voluntary redundancies there are now only a handful of people facing compulsory redundancy. But I am one of four hourly paid workers in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) fighting redundancy.

Many staff at the college will not realise that we are still struggling for our jobs because the management has been on a propaganda offensive to make it appear that there are no job losses.

Most recently they artificially reduced the number of redundancies by issuing the hourly paids in ESOL with withdrawal of redundancy notices. However, they didn't bother to inform our programme managers of this. The managers have now timetabled for next year without us and we have been told there are no hours available.

We now face a summer with no redundancy pay (because apparently we are not redundant), having already missed many job opportunities, uncertain about what to say to students and colleagues and starting the summer feeling humiliated after a hellish process, during which we received misleading information.

We are redundant because our courses and the students who enrol on them are not valued as they should be. The government does not want to be seen to be spending money on immigrants. But without ESOL classes migrants risk isolation, problems accessing vital services, and even more barriers to finding work. Cutting ESOL is racist and sexist — the vast majority of students attending ESOL courses are women.

The government thinks it can push ESOL out into training agencies, charities and voluntary organisations — some of their provision will be excellent, much is not.

I have worked at Hackney College for six months and during that time have appreciated being in a team of highly skilled workers. Somewhere in this fight we need to talk about what we (teachers and students) want for education.

At a time of increased unemployment the government is slashing benefits and

forcing single parents back into work (what work?) by the time their children are starting schools. Yet a popular training course, plumbing, is also being cut at Hackney. The borough already has high unemployment rates and desperately needs investment in education to give people on the dole the best chance of learning the new skills they need to help transform their lives and work. The last thing Hackney needs is bigger class sizes, fewer course options, a massive hike in course fees and staff losing their jobs.

There are undoubtedly more cuts to come and the chance of fighting does feel bleak. None of the public sector unions are doing enough. Here are a few ideas that can be the start of a conversation about how we gear up collectively.

For many years at Hackney staff have taken a day's strike; often this has been to defend hourly paid workers. As hourly paid workers we are seen as the ultimate flexible workforce, to be picked up and dropped whenever management like. With urgency we need to challenge the casualisation of Further Education.

We also need to face the fact that we are going to have to strike for longer than a day or two to defend or win anything. We need to talk in our union branches about what a union is and build democratic spaces where all workers feel they can contribute and where we push beyond the limits imposed by the top levels of the union.

It's our union; we should take ownership of it. We should challenge the union bureaucracy for such things as outrageous spending over congress dinners and start using our union subs to support organising and strike funds. A motion condemning the spending at UCU Congress was successfully passed at the London Regional Conference recently and the same motion was passed at Hackney branch meeting — so this is being challenged.

Finally, it is going to take more than industrial action to fight off the cuts to education. I think it is through the support of, and joint work with, the community that we will win.

We cannot wait till further cuts happen to start our fightback, we need to organise now *as a community*. If we want to defend what we have that is good in education, and build on it, we have a real fight ahead.

You pay more for higher education!

# No to the Graduate Tax!

## A STATEMENT FROM THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST FEES AND CUTS

1. We oppose the Lib Dem-Tory coalition government's plans for a graduate tax. At the same time, this "exercise in rebranding" fees (as lecturers' union UCU put it) is not the only or even the worst problem with Vince Cable's plans, which amount to a massive extension of marketisation in our university system.

We demand an end to all fees, free education and living grants for all students; we want higher education to be run as a public service, funded by taxing the rich and business.

2. The graduate tax is rebranding because the existing system is already, as Cable has admitted, a form of graduate tax. Under his plans, students will still pay for university, and in fact pay more, with all the inevitable consequences in terms of access to higher education. A graduate tax is the Lib Dems' way of squaring their promise to abolish fees with their enthusiastic participation in a right-wing Tory government committed to further marketising higher education.

The leaderships of the National Union of Students and the Labour Party are, unfortunately, in agreement with the government that students should pay for university. NUS in particular has been utterly pathetic, falling over itself to welcome Cable's proposals. The real question is why students should have to pay at all. We do not expect those who use the NHS to pay any kind of charge or tax, nor those who have children and use schools. The same goes for all kinds of other public services funded out of general taxation. The Tories and Lib Dems might like a world where people are charged for using hospitals or schools, but they don't dare admit it. So why should university or college be any different?

Education is a good in itself, a public service which benefits individuals and society. It should not be seen as a ticket to a higher paid job, particularly since the great majority of those who graduate from university will not be high paid, if they are lucky enough to get a job at all. "User pays" is an extremely dangerous principle, a wedge pushed into the heart of the welfare state.

3. Of course, we will be told that the money for free education isn't there. Yet this year, just the individuals on the *Sunday Times* "rich list" — that's the

1,000 wealthiest people in the country — increased their wealth by £77 billion. So much for "all in it together"! Compare that to the £7 billion the scrapped Building Schools for the Future scheme costs, or the £8 billion it would cost to abolish all fees, not only for British students but international ones as well (the figure for home students only is £2.7 billion).

The idea that cuts and higher fees are necessary or unavoidable is simply nonsense. The reality is that this government of millionaires is seeking to make the vast majority of people — workers, the unemployed, pensioners, students — pay for the crisis the bankers created while the rich, after a little wobble, continue to rake it in.

We shouldn't let them pull the wool over our eyes. We should demand that instead of making cuts the government scraps Trident, taxes the rich, takes over the wealth of the banks which we are subsidising as taxpayers anyway. The public is a majority shareholder in RBS. Why not use its profits rather than the scraped-together savings of working-class graduates to pay for education?

The choice is not universities vs schools or universities vs hospitals. It's between the jobs and services we all need and the greed of big business and the super-rich.

4. At the same time, Vince Cable says he wants to see some two-year degrees, more students living at home, university closures/mergers — according to the *Guardian*, at least twenty universities will close in the next few years under his plans — and a big expansion of private universities. He wants to expand the marketised system which New Labour put in place, meaning a liberal education for an elite and low-quality, underfunded training to turn the rest of us into pliant workers for exploitation. Though NUS has failed to recognise it, this is the central thrust of his plans, and must be vigorously opposed.

5. Just as there will be strikes by public sector and other workers against the government's plans for cuts, there will be mass student resistance continuing the surge in occupations and direct action against cuts which began last year. NUS's welcoming of a graduate tax suggests that it will be at best an unreliable leader for that resistance. The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts exists to coordinate the fight back, strengthen it and help it win.

• <http://anticuts.com/>

Preparing for class struggle

By Sacha Ismail

One hundred and eighty people attended Ideas for Freedom (IFF), the weekend of socialist discussion hosted by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on 9-11 July in London. In the context of a Tory government committed to a vicious offensive against working-class living standards, rights and organisation, the school was lively, combining sharp theoretical debate with preparation for class struggle in the stormy period ahead.

IFF opened on the Friday night with a showing of *Kala Tara*, a film which tells the story of the Asian Youth Movement (AYM) — a radical, secular, left-influenced movement of Asian youth which fought racism, police brutality and the far right, and supported workers' struggles, in the 1970s and 80s.

The discussion which followed focused on the political strengths and limitations of the AYM, why its model of politics has since given way to right-wing religious and communal politics among many Asian youth and how these issues relate to struggles against racism and religious reaction in Muslim-majority communities today.

We hope to work with other socialists, including left-wing, secular activists in the Bengali community, to organise a showing of the film in East London in the near future.

A large part of the weekend was dedicated to discussions on how we fight the coalition government and the bosses' offensive.

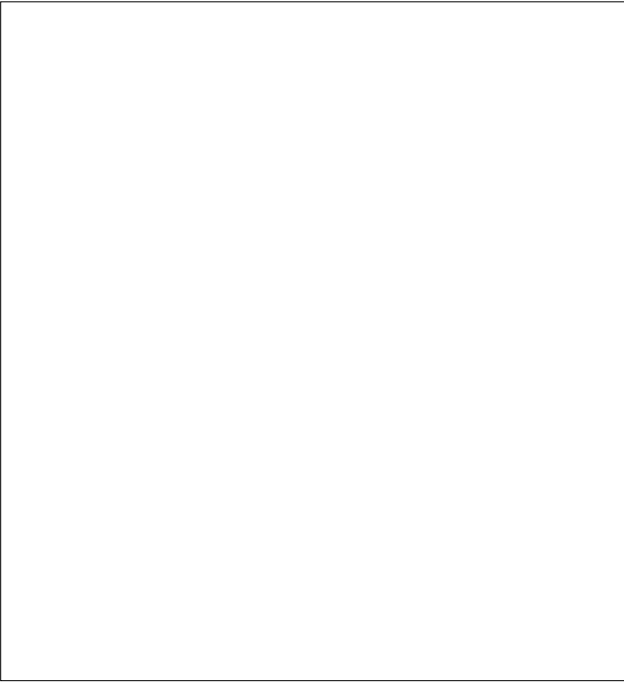
The opening plenary on Saturday was about the Tories' planned assault on what is left of comprehensive education and how we can oppose it (see the coverage on page 9).

Later in the day, Pat Murphy of the National Union of Teachers executive and Paul Holmes, left candidate for general secretary of Unison, began a useful discussion on how we get our labour movement fit to win this fight and others like it. And on Sunday young union activists Ruth Cashman (Unison) and Becky Crocker (RMT) led a packed workshop on "being a revolutionary at work", attended by a good mix of experienced trade unionists and young workers and students.

Throughout the event there were caucuses for comrades in various trade unions and industries. A women's caucus was held on Sunday lunchtime.



Left: The audience at Ideas for Freedom 2010. Right: Patrick Murphy, speaking in the session on how we can get the labour movement to fight the Tories.



DEBATES

Workers' Liberty prides itself on promoting a culture of debate — not only through the democracy of our own organisation, but with other currents and activists on the left. In contrast to the sterile sermonising and pseudo-debates of events like the SWP's Marxism, Ideas for Freedom was characterised by thoughtful and lively discussion — and by a number of formal debates.

Unfortunately, Compass withdrew from our planned debate on "Progressive or class politics?" at short notice; we hope to revive this plan at a meeting in the autumn. But we did debate Heiko Khoo of KarlMarx.net (recently expelled from the Socialist Appeal tendency) on the nature of Stalinism and the meaning of "Trotskyism" today; Pete Willsman of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the Labour national executive committee on socialists' attitude to the Labour Party; and Workers Power on Israel-Palestine. All these debates were useful, highlighting what is distinctive about Workers' Liberty's politics on questions such as national conflicts, Stalinism and orientation to the broad labour movement.

INTRODUCTIONS TO MARXISM

We continued our tradition of organising a number of "Introduction to Marxism" sessions.

Comrades delivered introductory workshops on Marxists' understanding of fascism; Trotsky's theory of

"permanent revolution" and the left's misuses of it; whether revolutionary workers need a Marxist party; and Engels on the origins of women's oppression. New and young comrades in particular were very positive about these sessions.

OTHER SESSIONS

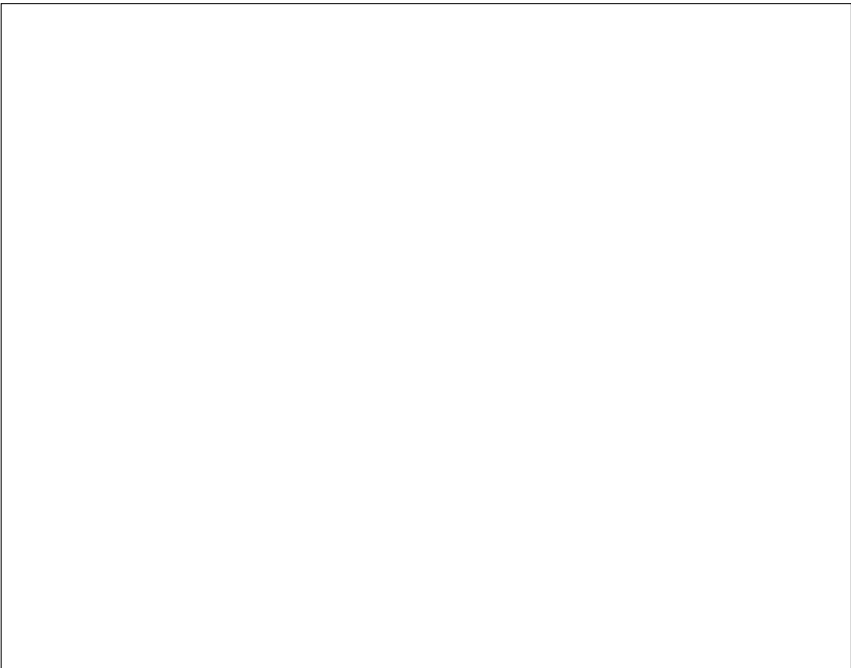
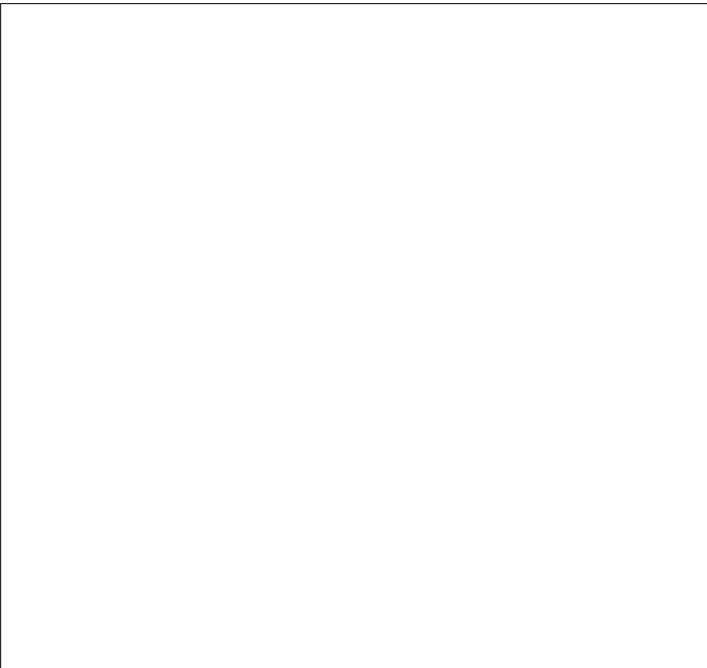
Other sessions included the AWL's Martin Thomas and Alfred Saad-Filho, Marxist economist, discussing the economics of the crisis; Janine Booth on the Poplar council rebellion; Elaine Jones on women in the Russian revolution; Jill Mountford's presentation on the politics of protest songs; Dave Elliott, expert on the Lucas Plan, and Workers' Climate Action activist Stuart Jordan on working-class environmentalism; Becky Shah of the Equality Trust on why inequality is growing.

After a speech from Sean Matgamna on how we can get ready for the class war which the Tories have already launched, and further discussion, we closed Ideas for Freedom by singing the Internationale.

BUILDING THE AWL

We feel the event was a success. Attendance was up from last year. £1,575 was raised by our collection. (And thanks to Colin for the raffle of his paintings, which raised £55!) Four people joined the AWL, and many more expressed an interest in discussing joining; a relatively large number will now start working with us.

Ideas for Freedom is a showcase for Workers' Liberty as a tendency which is pretty much unique on the British left — a rational, democratic, clear-thinking Marxist organisation, committed to independent working-class politics, to vigour in debate and to a non-sectarian approach to other socialists and to the broad labour movement. Despite our modest size, we believe that strengthening our organisation is essential to helping the working class win the battles that lie ahead. If you enjoyed the event, or are sorry you missed it, please consider working with us and, if you're convinced, becoming an AWL member.



Left: Paul Hampton, debating Heiko Khoo on the meaning of Trotskyism today. Right: Pete Willsman speaking in the session on the Labour Party.



# Fighting the Tories' plans for schools

The opening session of Ideas for Freedom 2010 was "How do we fight the Tories' plans for schools?". The session was chaired by Gemma Short, a first year teacher and AWL member from Sheffield. The keynote contributions are below.

*Jean Lane, teaching assistant and UNISON activist in Tower Hamlets*

**T**urning schools judged as "outstanding" by Ofsted into Academies is going to take money out of the central Local Education Authorities that fund all schools in their area, put that into Academies, leaving the rest of the schools in that area impoverished.

It's going to mean a massive class divide in terms of who can get what education and who can get what funding.

In Tower Hamlets we've already had the education workers working directly for the LEA threatened with redundancies, loss of pay, changes in the services that they provide, changes in the jobs that they do.

Special Educational Needs support will go. I work with students who come into school bringing all the problems they have at home. I work with students whose wrists are bleeding when I'm trying to teach them to add up fractions. Without the support services, without the SEN funding, without all of that extra stuff that goes on outside of just teaching in the classroom they would not survive school.

One school in my borough is threatening 21 redundancies. If they get away with it — which is unlikely — the members of staff left behind will have all of that work to do with far fewer staff to do it; they are also threatened with having their pay cut quite drastically, losing

thousands of pounds a year to continue to do the job that they normally do, plus.

I can see a scenario where union members are streets ahead of even the activists, let alone the bureaucrats when it comes to being angry about this. But we've got a job of work to do not just with our labour movement and our trade union movement but with the left as well, organising the anti-cuts campaigns.

*Liam Conway, secretary of Nottinghamshire National Union of Teachers*

**The thing that ties the academies and the cuts together is simple — class war. The government has declared massive class war in its schools programme.**

Class war in the same way as the miners' strike when they used all the forces of the state to pummel the miners into submission. It's likely they are going to do similar things in the fight to come in the public sector.

In the unions we have to fight for them to say things that they never said under Labour. They've got to talk about the need to attack the rich. The TUC and all the trade unions have to point the finger, and to say to working-class people, there's not a problem here of shortages, to point out what can be done.

In my sociology lessons, once a year, I buy the *Sunday Times* to read the annual rich list. The *ST* prints that list as a celebration of the wonders of the rich... they make a big thing about the philanthropy of the rich, building them up as genuinely nice people. Now, one thing I try to do with my sociology students is to tell them — and I think it is important to tell working-class people this — is that rich people hate working-class people. And, actually, working class people don't hate the rich enough!

In one year the rich increased their wealth by £77 billion. Now the Tories are planning to cut education, the schools budget for building, by £7 billion. So for us the case is simple — the money is over there, let's do with it what the bosses do with trade unions when they decide to take strike action, sequester it and redirect it toward the services that we need.

When the ruling class want to hit the rich, or when governments want to hit the rich, they can actually do it. Look at BP. Legally it is only liable to pay \$69 million in compensation. But it's going to be paying £13 billion to clean up the oil spill. There's no newspaper making a big outcry about that payout. But if there were a suggestion that £13 billion should be taken off them as a windfall tax there'd have been a massive outcry.

The Tories have turned the Academies programme on its head. They've dragged out the logic Blair had in mind on Academies, and that Blair couldn't completely publicly say. Labour Academies were mostly in deprived areas where a lot of pretty smart, new buildings were put in place. The idea of it, supposedly, was to raise standards in so-called failing schools. The Tory academies are completely different, because all of those schools lined up to become academies in the Labour scheme have now been stopped from getting any money for being rebuilt.

But the linking idea is privatisation — the Academies programme was always a privatising programme. New Labour also had a class-driven programme highlighted by their diet of vocational education, preparing working class kids just for work and not for the class struggle. Well socialist teachers need to be preparing kids for the class struggle in schools!

There is a low level of morale in the trade union movement to an extent, but there is also a huge amount of anger out there. People really are asking what is going on? What is happening with pensions? What is happening with Building Schools? What is going to happen to our pay? Are we going to lose jobs?

We need to organise the movement, reorient what we do towards this battle that is to come, to feed on what people are saying, and build in the unions for strike action as early as possible.

We've got to build the confidence of the membership of the trade union movement in order to take on this full frontal assault on our class. It can be done. When you go into schools and explain what's going on and feed off their anger, they are up for a fight, they will take on their bullying managers and they will take on a bullying government bent on class war.

*Tali Janner-Klausner, London School Students' Union and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts activist*

**We need to think about the process of schools becoming Academies, that it has no community involvement, that it's been pushed upon many**

**schools, and that thousands of schools in the next couple of years could just become Academies without there being a chance of a big movement of resistance.**

The academies bill doesn't allow for anyone in the local community, not parents, not teachers, not people whose kids would be going to the school, to have any say in whether the school becomes an academy. The only people involved in this process are governors, the sponsor and central government.

There's no requirement for even a consultation, this is obviously a big contrast with the fluffy "Big Society" idea — we're empowering parents and ordinary people — there just seems to be no element of that rhetoric in the actual content of the bill.

Governors will not be accountable. Instead of being appointed by the elected councillors of the local authority and elected by parents or by teachers, academies governors will all be appointed by the sponsor.

At one academy a friend of mine attends, one governor is the sponsor, one the sponsor's wife, one is a parent governor who was appointed and two of them are friends of the sponsor.

The privatisation and cuts work together to deepen inequality. In the past month plans to extend free school meals have been scrapped — this also links into the Academies/Free Schools programme. Of the "outstanding" schools which are being given Academy status, they have 40% fewer children on free school meals.

We need to remember that even though all these things are really awful and we need to oppose them, the system that we are defending has a lot of problems in it as well. We still need to keep in mind exams, school discipline, military recruitment in schools, tuition fees; we need to oppose these things as well.

Teachers and parents instinctively don't want a corporation or an unaccountable group running their school. But this opposition has been really muted. The main reason for that, I think, is that Academies will get more money. Again, this links into cuts; people think, well, we're going to get 25% cuts, how can we make sure that our school is not affected by those? Well, Academies get more money!

I think the people in the NUT have talked about strike action over academies but perhaps they might want to wait to fight over pay and conditions and pensions over the next couple of years rather than on a political issue like this. So activists in the NUT or NASUWT or the other teaching or support unions really need to push for strike action.

Transcripts of some of the sessions from IFF 2010 can be found at: [www.workersliberty.org/story/2010/07/13/ideas-freedom-2010](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2010/07/13/ideas-freedom-2010)

Our suggested background reading for individual sessions can be found at [www.workersliberty.org/iff-read](http://www.workersliberty.org/iff-read)

## Will you help the socialist alternative?

With the new government's cuts beginning to bite, we need to step up our work to create a socialist voice. We have no rich donors or "captains of industry" to finance our work. We want to raise £25,000 in the course of this year and it can only come from donations from people who agree with our ideas and think our work is valuable.

Our fundraising total stands at £12,488.50. We raised £1,575 at IFF; B has given us £300 and A has donated £30. We also have £165 in new standing orders (total £825).

With less than half a year to go, we are less than half the way to our total. Time to step up our efforts!

CAN YOU HELP US?

- Could you take a few copies of our paper to circulate at work or college? Contact our office for details.

- Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).

- Donate directly, online — go to [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org) and click on the donate button.

- Send cheques made payable to "AWL" to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, or make a donation directly through internet banking (to "AWL", account number as above);

- Contact us to discuss joining the AWL

## LABOUR LEADERSHIP CONTEST

# Why we shouldn't support Diane Abbott

The AWL's national committee thought we should argue for a critical vote for Diane Abbott in the Labour leadership contest. But not everyone agrees.

## “We should propagandise for a spoilt ballot”

**N**o-one in the AWL is claiming Abbott to be a decent or even passable candidate. We recognise her candidacy was in some way a buffer to stop a serious class-fighter like John McDonnell getting on the ballot. But we over-estimate any advantages in using her candidacy as a propaganda tool; and she doesn't talk about the things we use as reasons to support her.

One of the main arguments in her favour (in Vote Abbott but organise the left... [www.workersliberty.org/node/14505](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14505)) is that she is nominally on the correct side of a few key questions, such as Trident, education, Iraq, foundation hospitals and immigration. In parliament she has voted “correctly” on some of these issues. Two problems: firstly, I'm not sure whether voting in parliament is a good enough acid-test of left-wing credentials. Secondly, no political explanation for her voting against such things appears anywhere in her campaign.

We can intervene in these debates positively without having to lend support to a candidate.

When Abbott talks about the graduate tax as something “worth considering” she is wrong. When she says she doesn't want to move the party to the left, she is wrong. It is nonsense to advise affiliated workers and members to “express their hostility to the new Labour line” by voting for rubbish over four kinds of stinking rubbish.

We have also claimed that a higher vote for Abbott will “boost the will and confidence of the broader left”(!) This is not a trade union general secretary election; Abbott is not the next Serwotka, not only because she has no politics to sell out in the first place, but because she has had nothing to do with the unions whatsoever.

There is no point in boosting the vote of a candidate who is very clearly not left-wing and who doesn't mention any of the things that we are using as a reason/excuse to vote for her. I'm having a lot of trouble working out why we are backing a candidate solely because they say that nuclear weapons and racism are bad things.

We should propagandise for a spoilt ballot, arguing that whilst Abbott had voted against the war she has nothing to offer the labour movement beyond empty rhetoric and posturing.

Whatever the result of the contest, Constituency Labour Parties and union branches need to put pressure on the party machinery for greater democracy in its structures and policy procedures and be just as harsh on the right-wingers as the fake-left charlatans like Abbott.

*Chris Marks*

## “A tick-list of policies is not enough”

**T**he AWL's decision appears to be premised on the idea that Diane Abbott is a “standard-issue Labour left MP”, or perhaps “similar to John McDonnell but not as good”. That might have been true over the years of, say, Jeremy Corbyn, or Alan Simpson, or Alice Mahon, or John Cryer, or others. We would be absolutely right to back someone like this. But I would argue that Diane Abbott is not of this order at all. She is something different: not left, but fake left.

Diane Abbott:

- is held in contempt in her own constituency (“standard-issue” Labour left MPs are usually well-liked)
- sent her son to a private school
- hosts a TV programme with Michael Portillo and is close friends with other Tories eg. Jonathan Aitken
- supported the privatisation of London Underground's East London Line.

Diane Abbott is known as much for these things as

for being any kind of left-winger. Even the extent to which she is seen as a left-winger is problematic. It relies on a definition of “left” that is based on single issues (supplemented by being black and female), not on siding with workers. Even those who perceive her as left-wing do not particularly associate her with trade unions or workers' struggles, as she does not associate herself with them.

Our list of her leftiness — “She will be the one candidate who was against the Iraq invasion and is for trade union rights, for migrant rights, for expanded council housing, for taxing the rich, for scrapping British nuclear weapons, for fighting cuts, against privatisation, for free higher education” — could also apply to George Galloway. Diane Abbott is not the same as George Galloway, but this shows that a tick-list of policies is not enough to justify endorsing her. Sometimes, a candidate has other things on his/her record that cancel out a list of okay policies.

Moreover, she is not as left-wing, or rebellious, as you might imagine. In the last Parliament, Diane Abbott voted against the government in 68 votes out of 871 she attended (7.8%); John McDonnell did so in 205 votes out of 824 (24.9%). (Kate Hoey rebelled 153 times, more than twice as often as Abbott; and even Frank Field had a higher percentage rebellion, at 10.8%.)

The article (‘Vote Abbot but organise the left’... web reference above) argues that: “A critical vote for Diane Abbott will not cut across getting a hearing for our ideas.” I think that a critical vote for Diane Abbott would cut across us getting a hearing for our ideas from those people who see her for what she is. I am also not convinced that voting Abbott will “boost the broader left” as this assumes. If the left backs her and she gets a decent vote, then that may boost the perception of the strength of the left — but at the cost of politically endorsing Abbott as representative of the left, and therefore redefining what it is to be “left” in a negative direction. So you can be “left” — indeed a representative, a champion of the left — while supporting privatisation, sending your son to private school, hobnobbing with Tories and sitting out workers' struggles?! Is that a definition of “left” that we want to boost?!

Finally, the decision to support Diane Abbott does not appear to even consider the role she has played in this leadership election, where her candidacy scuppered John McDonnell's chances of getting on the ballot paper.

When socialists decide who to back in an election, we need to consider not just that candidate's formal policies, but whether supporting his/her candidature would advance the cause of socialism and working-class representation. With Diane Abbott, I just don't see how it does. She is not a credible socialist candidate, and socialists do ourselves no credit by supporting her.

*Janine Booth*

## “Our position on the Labour Party is hinged on the union link”

**I** think the article (‘Vote Abbot but organise the left’... web reference above) overlooks a lot of Abbott's politics and record. Putting aside whether you would vote for her or not, it is soft on her. It does not mention her role in various privatisation projects, her lack of role in her constituency, her lack of open support for even the most high profile strikes, sending her kid to a private school.

Second. I find several of the conclusions politically confused. For example “If we have to choose, then advocating and explaining our own ideas comes before helping to boost the broader left. In this case, a critical vote for Diane Abbott will not cut across getting a hearing for our ideas.” I agree with the first part, therefore to me the second part is wrong. We're not making clear political points about what the Labour Party should be, by advocating a vote for Abbott we would be capitulating to the idea floating around the broad left about having a “more diverse, open, different” Labour Party: and that is not an argument based in class struggle and the labour movement, it is an argument based in soft left opportunistic and populist politics.

Third. Our position on the Labour Party is hinged on

the union link. Our argument in supporting McDonnell is not about making a slightly more politically left Labour Party, it is about making the arguments for rebuilding the union link and having leadership accountable to the labour movement. Abbott's connection with the labour movement is weak. A vote for her does not strengthen the union link, make those arguments clear or strengthen the labour movement.

It appears to me that there are other ways to express opposition to the New Labour machine than capitulating to a soft left candidate that does not actually clearly oppose it or pose the question of accountability to the labour movement as an alternative. One of those may well be spoilt ballots but I'm not convinced on such a policy.

Finally, there is a big big difference between the policy of “least worst” candidates in trade unions to in the Labour Party. One is the labour movement, the other is becoming progressively being divorced from the labour movement.

*Gemma Short*

## “We will appear either faint-hearted or hypocritical”

**I**f we are serious about standing for “working class political representation” we will not advance our credibility by backing a candidate for the Labour Party leadership who would appear not only not to have any ties to the movement but also to act in a way which bolsters the ruling class. Sending your child to private school seems to me to do exactly that.

The battle over state education has intensified with the attempt by Gove to smash local authority links with schools, implement “free” schools and coerce or bribe schools into becoming academies. Within a few years, if he succeeds, for-profit companies are likely to have made major inroads into state provision of education. The Labour Party will be unable to challenge this model (let alone argue for a comprehensive system) with any of the five candidates at its helm. They all believe in selective education. Those who have sent their children to private school will be the least credible in arguing against extending private provision more widely.

In my view we will not earn ourselves a hearing by endorsing Abbott “critically”. We will appear either faint-hearted or hypocritical. On this occasion I think we should say what we indeed believe, that none of those on the ballot endorses or advances socialist politics or working-class political representation, and this is the deciding factor in the new political circumstances which pertain after the election.

There seems to me to be an increasingly obvious but as yet undebated crisis of political representation in the country (sparked perhaps by the parliamentary expenses scandal, echoed on the left by the criticism of the high pay and costly perks of some union leaders, evident in the succession of low turnouts and given an edge by the growth in the numbers voting for far-right/fascist candidates). If this is so, should we not be using the Labour Party leadership-contest to make clear how unrepresentative these candidates are of Labour Party “core voters” and the working-class as a whole? Isn't it our analysis of what political representation means which we should be concerned to advance openly now? I do not think this can be honestly done while lining up behind any of the five MPs on the leadership ballot. What might seem attractive tactically risks, in my view, cutting against our strategic better interests.

*Pat Yarker*

**For further debate, including the AWL's position on the Labour leadership contest, see:**  
<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2010/06/21/vote-abbott-organise-left-clear-policies>

**For more debate on the maternity question, see:**  
<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2010/07/15/we-should-question-medical-opinion>

## MEMOIRS OF CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

## Never one of us

Tom Unterrainer reviews *Hitch-22* by Christopher Hitchens

**A**ny number of questions popped into my mind whilst reading *Hitch-22* – Christopher Hitchens’ recently published memoir – but two in particular kept coming back. The first: was Hitchens really ever “one of us”? The second: would it be easier to convince a Hitchens admirer or one of his mortally hostile “left wing” critics of my politics? Why did these questions keep coming back?

There’s an enviable amount to admire in Hitchens’ journalistic and other written output; some of the positions he defends overlap with most rational socialists’ instinctual sympathies and there are few public figures who take up the polemical cudgels to such entertainingly brutal effect.

But at the same time as being an outspoken critic of fascists old and new, a defender of minority national rights and unrelentingly hostile to religious mysticism of all types, Hitchens has been decisively wrong — and it seems to me, in this book at least, grossly disingenuous — on Bush Jr, the invasion of Iraq and the “War on Terror” more generally.

But Hitchens is no Max Shachtman or one of the numerous but lesser known movement activists of old who ended up in “the wrong camp”. His political trajectory did not include a long period of organised activism — Hitchens was a student member of the SWP precursor organisation, the International Socialists — but rather a literary sojourn through a series of prestigious liberal publications.

In other respects though, his story does caricature the careers of some in the group of people known as the “New York Intellectuals”: people who went from outspoken support for Trotsky against the show trials and slander, socialist anti-Stalinism against the self-despoiling antics of the Lillian Hellman’s of this world, support for workers’ struggles and the plight of the oppressed and exploited to full-blown apology-mongering for the US during the heights of the Cold War.

These characters concluded, rightly, that the Stalinist regime was reactionary and socially backward as compared to the Western bourgeois democracies. They also believed that against the barbarity of Stalinism and the apparently imminent existential threat it posed, stood one relatively progressive force: American state and imperial power. This assurance in “relative progress” — uncoupled from the socialist “baggage” of their pasts — opened the door to a very different political world.

The turning point for Hitchens, as it was for a great many of us, seems to have been the events of September 11 2001, the poisonous nightmare of clerical-fascism. He concluded those groups and individuals who helped organise the slaughter are the mortal enemies of us all.

From the obviously correct assertion that as against the murderers of 9/11 Western democracy is progres-

sive, against the backdrop of expected future attacks by similarly minded killers and the rest, Hitchens and company threw their weight behind the drive to war: in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere — including coordinating meetings, lobbying, glad-handing and schmoozing an already war-hungry administration.

This position is an indication that his past — and any remaining — affinity with socialistic causes was really rather shallow.

Our response to the events of 9/11 shows the contrast:

“In cold-bloodedness, the New York massacre even exceeds its models. We, the socialists, cannot bring back the dead, heal the wounded, or assuage the bereaved. What we can do is understand the conditions which gave rise to the atrocity; see how they can be changed...” (*Solidarity*, 14 November 2001).

But our article goes on to warn of the need to “...keep a clear critical understanding of the way that the US and other governments will respond.”

We said: “The US government will enact ... bombing raids abroad and a clampdown at home. Its aim will be to make a show of retaliation and retribution. It will not and cannot mend the conditions which gave rise to this atrocity, conditions which the US government itself, capitalist and imperialist, has helped to shape. Probably ordinary working people who live in ‘terrorist’ states will be the victims.”

We refused to dump our politics. Where Hitchens polemicised and organised around the idea that the US and her allies could bring democracy and stability to places like Iraq — in advance of any actual evidence and in the face of a rotten record elsewhere — socialists refused to invest their trust and political energies in any such force.

Was 9/11 really a Paul of Tarsus moment for Hitchens or just a quick and easy change of step? Could he really ever have been “one of us”?

In *Hitch-22*, while reminiscing over a trip to California and the visits he made to a number of picket

lines of “very spirited” strikes, Hitchens recalls a meeting with Hal Draper (whom he contemptuously refers to as a “guru”). Here Hitchens professes a “faith in the revival of the working class” but seems a bit disappointed — if not dismissive — of what was exciting Draper at the time — César Chávez’s organising work.

That does not have the allure of other prospects for Hitchens. Despite his one-time membership of the IS and one-time confidence in the working class, Hitchens was never part of the workers’ movement per se.

So when the barbarian atrocities of 9/11 struck, Hitchens — 20 years or more down the road from his meeting with Draper — had nowhere but the Bush administration to turn. It is unsurprising that his account of the journey from liberal journalism to lobbying the Pentagon avoids a full reckoning with the sort of politics you might expect to bother a one-time socialist. He was never “one of us”.

The most moving section of *Hitch-22* tells the story of Mark Daily. Daily was “briefly a vegetarian and Green Party member because he couldn’t stand cruelty to animals or to the environment, a student who loudly defended Native American rights”, he was also someone who “challenged a MySpace neo-Nazi in an online debate in which the swastika-displaying antagonist finally admitted the he needed to rethink things.” Daily was also very briefly a soldier serving in Iraq, until he was killed on duty.

According to the Daily family’s account, Mark was inspired to join the US armed forces by Hitchens’ writings. There’s something admirable in this impulse but it’s far out-shadowed by the tragedy that became of the impulse. Out-shadowed also by the fact that the energies and obvious intelligence of someone like Daily could have far better served a different kind of impulse.

I’d like to think that if Daily had stumbled upon the Workers’ Liberty website or found a copy of the American journal *New Politics* then things could be very different. No amount of effort on Hitchens’ part could convince anyone with a synaptic connection or two of the post-event symmetries of the occupation of Iraq and the war to defend the Spanish revolution from fascists. His efforts to compare the US armed forces to the international volunteers who flocked to Spain is embarrassingly disingenuous in the extreme — all the more so when dealing with Daily’s death.

But what of the many hundreds if not thousands who responded and still respond to the events of 9/11 and the sequence of wars and invasions that followed with a concrete misunderstanding of the world?

Can we reach the “fuck the USA”, “destroy Israel”, “we are Hezbollah” quasi-socialists who fall into the arms of groups like the Socialist Workers Party — the offspring of Hitchen’s International Socialists — and either bunker down or drift off with time? Again, I think with a little effort we can. The evidence? I was one of them.

## No fairy tale endings

BY CATH FLETCHER

**O**ut of work? Stuck on benefits? Not any more, thanks to Channel 4’s *Fairy Job Mother*. This latest contribution to the new TV genre of “austerity chic” aims to get people off the dole and into a job. With the help of a spot of life-coaching and a new haircut. Yes, that’s what you need to beat unemployment in the world of Con-Dem cuts.

This is, more or less, Supernanny for grown-ups, and sees loud Yorkshirewoman Hayley Taylor (previously on that other Channel 4 recession’s-topical-isn’t-it series *Benefit Busters*) descend on a different household each week, for a three-week period. She even stays overnight with them, but just the one night, you understand, because that’s clearly all she can take before checking into the local Hilton where she can get some underpaid chambermaid to iron her signature scarves.

Taylor previously worked for one of those private firms that’s paid a large amount of public money to run the New Deal. And the style of the programme is very

much the style of the New Deal — to bully unemployed people into a crap minimum-wage job on the basis that any work is better than none. Like any good reality TV show emotions run high, there are tears before bedtime and it ends on a heartwarming note. Its main purpose, clearly, is to comfort viewers of Channel 4 that it’s not that hard to get a job if only you try.

Cynics might think that the fact the candidates were accompanied by a camera crew, thus offering to their potential employers tens of thousands of pounds worth of free advertising on national telly, helped two of the participants get jobs.

If that wasn’t all bad enough, the gender politics on display here are fit to shock. Hayley tells the women she’s coaching that they’re beautiful. A random good-looking woman in a coffee shop is found to be self-employed. Employment makes you attractive, you see and if you run your own business you’ll have guys falling over themselves to meet you. The men, on the other hand, are sent down the boxing gym to work out their frustrations, brain injury being, apparently, a fantastic aspiration for working-class blokes. When in episode one Dean found work as a kitchen fitter this

meant he could now “provide for his family”. If you can manage to look past the hideous politics, The Fairy Job Mother has some worthwhile insights about life without work. That it’s impossible to take agency work, for example, because once you sign off it takes six weeks to sign on again, and in order to survive you have to turn to the local “loan man” as the programme politely put it (the term’s loan shark, Hayley, when the interest rate’s 60%). And if you think, hard, about the couple in episode one, it might occur to you that had it not been for her mother’s offer of free childcare, even getting work experience would have been impossible for Maxine. Not that the programme mentioned that.

The Fairy Job Mother does, in a small way, what grammar schools used to do for working-class children – give a few of them special treatment so they can get out. If Hayley Taylor could magically visit every unemployed person in the country and offer her special brand of motivation, would there be any more jobs? No. Why does this programme exist? To make us feel that it’s only the undeserving poor who’ll get hit by benefit cuts. The clue’s in the title. This isn’t a solution. It’s a fairy tale.

# Labour Executive moves to limit review of party structures

BY RHODRI EVANS

**T**he Labour Party's National Executive has moved to limit the review of Labour Party structures which is promised to start from October 2010 to a mere consultation on details of the existing ultra-undemocratic structures, pushed onto the party by Tony Blair after his election victory in 1997.

Despite all the talk from David Miliband, and even more so the other candidates for Labour leader, about "moving on" from New Labour, the Labour Party machine is clearly still as "New Labour" (i.e. undemocratic, bureaucratic, manipulative, distant from the labour movement) as ever.

The widespread feeling that Labour should fight the Tory cuts as New Labour never could have, and the small (but, in relative terms, significant) influx of new members, create a head of steam for democratic improvements. These could be won despite the restrictions on the review by rule changes being voted through 2011 conference.

But improvements depend on the unions matching action to words.

A recent Unite Executive statement talks of the "opportunity" which now exists to "free the Labour Party from the Partnership in Power process" (the structure imposed in 1997). It will be an opportunity — if Unite leaders act on the lines of the statement.

The Unite Executive statement says that this coming Labour Party conference "will" see an end to the 2007 exclusion of "motions" in favour of "issues". The National Executive is still committed to reversing that exclusion, and if Unite and the other big unions stick to their position it will have no choice but to keep to its commitment.

The Unite Executive statement also favours removing the restriction that motions have to be "contemporary motions". And the recent GMB congress voted to support a rule change long advocated by the Labour left, to allow Labour conference to amend and vote in parts on National Policy Forum documents. That rule change, though apparently technical, would give conference a degree of control over policy greater even than it had in the pre-Blair days, when composites passed by conference could always be overridden by unamendable National Executive statements.

David Miliband, so it turns out, has around £800,000 from wealthy donors to fund his campaign for Labour leader, even more than reported by the *New Statesman* magazine. The other candidates have at most tens of thousands. And it shows: vast numbers of glossy leaflets, and large numbers of sharp-suited young men and women paid to work full-time on the David Miliband campaign. (According to the *Daily Mirror*, "a number of Blair's staff have been seconded... to help with the leadership campaign").

David Miliband has also, it's not clear how, got hold of a copy of the Labour Party membership list, enabling him to mail all members, while the other candidates do not have the list. (Ed Miliband may have a copy of the list: it's not clear).

David Miliband's leader campaign leaflet says that as a small child his "first love" was "not Marx and Engels, but football". So maybe he won't understand when we say that he represents a continuing drive to cut the Labour Party's links with the working class. We should just say that the unions should give him a red card.

• Meanwhile Labour's Conference Arrangements Committee has ruled out of order almost all the rule changes proposing democratic improvement which were submitted by local Labour Parties to the 2009 conference and which (under an odd rule, dating from 1968, which says that rule changes, except those proposed by the National Executive, must be debated the year after they're submitted) were due for debate at this year's conference.

More: [www.workersliberty.org/node/14732](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14732)

## LABOUR LEADERSHIP CONTEST

# Vote Miliband for torture!

Ann Mack looks at David Miliband's campaign material

**Y**our grandfather fought in the Red Army in the years immediately following the October Revolution. Your father was a Marxist academic renowned for his critique of the Labour Party as a party obsessed with parliamentary politics which always prostrated itself before the capitalist status quo when in power.

So what do you do to maintain the family tradition?

Well, if your name is David Miliband, you stand for election to the position of Labour Party leader as the standard-bearer of the Blairite right-wing, you say nothing about how to combat Tory/Lib-Dem attacks on the working class, and you focus purely and simply on what you (wrongly) think will allow Labour to win the next election.

Having raised more money than any of the other Labour Party leadership candidates (because you are the natural choice of the well-heeled and the well-bred, and you already have assorted Lords and millionaires backing you), you also send out mailshots to unsuspecting Labour Party members in which you try to con them into voting for you.

"We lost the last election," explains Miliband in his mailshot. I want us to win the next one. But to do so we have to do things differently." So the Parliamentary Labour Party will be kicking out the all the time-serving careerists in its ranks? It will mount a campaign of parliamentary disruption? It will support demonstrations, strikes and occupations against cuts in public spending?

Not quite. Miliband's suggestions about how Labour should do politics "differently" turn out to equate pretty much to continuing to do them the way New Labour institutionalised them over the past two decades.

Miliband promises that he will "return democracy to the Party." That sounds promising. So let's not dwell on the fact that Miliband said nothing against the dismantling of party democracy in recent years, or the fact that he actually supported it.

But then you get to the small print. Restoring party democracy, it turns out, does not mean, say, restoring the right of Constituency Labour Parties to submit motions to national conference, or scrapping the inordinate power wielded by the Parliamentary Labour Party in the structures of the Labour Party.

It means... allowing an elected party chairperson to attend meetings of the Shadow Cabinet! "Doing politics differently"....?

Miliband says he "reject(s) the old political culture which sees members as cheerleaders, or as a problem to be controlled" and that he will "double party membership."

But hang on a minute! Miliband's rise to influence in the Labour Party went hand in hand with the manufacturing of a political culture in which the problem of members who could not be controlled was solved by replacing them with cheerleading clones, and by transforming party conferences into leader-worshipping rallies which prostrated themselves before the likes of... David Miliband.

Miliband welcomed the leadership's "liberation" from Party members who thought that decisions on party policy and election manifestos should be made by the membership rather than by Oxford graduates who fancied a career in the Labour Party.

And the promise to double party membership? The last time we heard that kind of talk was when Blair was elected party leader in 1994 and declared a membership target of a million. What happened? Party membership slumped from 405,000 in 1997 to 280,000 in 2002.

Miliband says he will "maintain the union link and recruit trade unionists to Labour." What does he mean? He means that he will oppose "the Tory-Liberal government plan to break the union link."

That, if is true, would certainly be progress. Miliband's collaboration in attacking Labour-union links includes his support for the decision of the 2007 Labour Party conference to ban trade unions from submitting policy motions to Labour Party conference. Perhaps severing the Labour-union link is not a job for Tories and Liberal Democrats — it's a job for David Miliband and his acolytes.

Miliband will give selected party members community organising skills. He will "give a voice for Labour councillors in the Shadow Cabinet" by allowing "the leader of Labour's councillors" to attend Shadow Cabinet meetings. And he will create seats on the National Executive Committee (NEC) for representation from the Scottish and Welsh Labour Parties.

So Miliband's recipe for "doing politics differently" and revolutionising the Labour Party consists of getting a couple of blokes from Wales and Scotland to attend NEC meetings, getting a councillor and the Labour Party chair to attend Shadow Cabinet meetings, and encouraging more people to join the Labour Party.

Miliband's "vision" of a transformed Labour Party is rather like his first conference speech (in 2007) as Foreign Secretary, when he promised to learn from past mistakes, change from the foreign policy of the last ten years, and launch "a second wave of New Labour foreign policy."

In the event, and despite all the promises of change, things carried on very much as before, with Miliband's best known achievement as Foreign Secretary being his unsuccessful attempt to cover up British complicity in torture in the 'war on terror'.

But "Vote Miliband for Torture" is not a likely vote-winner.

## IN BRIEF: LEADERSHIP CONTEST

**Diane Abbott:** The AWL thinks Labour members and political levy-paying trade unionists should vote for Diane Abbott in the Labour leadership election. We should vote for Diane Abbott while saying that she cannot be trusted using the campaign as leverage to rally people round a class struggle programme

- More: [www.workersliberty.org/node/14414](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14414).
- Leaflet for hustings: [www.workersliberty.org/node/14620](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14620)

**Unions:** The public services union Unison has announced (21 July) that its "national political committee [has given] Ed Miliband its backing in the forthcoming ballot for Labour leadership.

"The decision", it says, "was taken after consultation throughout the affiliated members of the union. Hustings at Unison's national political conference, attended by 200 Unison Labour Party members representing the regions, were held in early July. All the

candidates were present and the hustings were broadcast over the union's website".

The union statement does not mention what we are told by activists who were at the Unison political conference — that Diane Abbott got most applause there, and that the conference was not allowed to vote on which candidate the union would recommend!

The remaining big union to choose whom to nominate is Unite, due to decide on Monday 26 July. The rumour-mill gives Ed Balls and Ed Miliband equal chances there.

All political levy paying members of unions affiliated to Labour will vote individually in postal elections organised by their unions, so it is impossible to predict which way these votes will go. Union nominations for Labour leader so far:

Ed Miliband: Unison, GMB, NUM, Unity (small ceramics and pottery union), Diane Abbott: TSSA, ASLEF, David Miliband: USDAW, Community (former steelworkers' union, now a small miscellaneous union), Ed Balls: CWU, Andy Burnham: None.



UNITE GENERAL SECRETARY ELECTION

# We need a union fit for purpose

By DALE STREET

**B**ranches and workplace reps' committees of the union Unite are holding meetings to decide whom to nominate to take over as Unite General Secretary. Nominations have to be made by early September, and the election itself will take place in late October/early November.

Unite is Britain's biggest union (with a claimed membership of two million). The result of the election will impact not just on Unite but also on the broader trade union movement and — as Unite is Labour's biggest union affiliate — on the Labour Party as well.

**LES BAYLISS**

**O**ne right-wing candidate is Les Bayliss. Backed by the Workers Uniting Group, Bayliss represents a continuation of the old-style machine-politics and bureaucratic despotism which prevailed in Amicus. (Unite is the product of a merger between Amicus and the TGWU.)

Bayliss's saving grace is that he does not mince his words. According to his election material, he will put an end to "adventurism and infantile and phoney militancy that alienates our members and the general public." He will have no truck with "bravado and mock militancy, cheap publicity stunts and 'back of a fag packet' bargaining strategies."

Getting rid of mock militancy — if it actually exists — would be a good thing. But Bayliss is certainly the last candidate wanting to replace it by real militancy.

Bayliss promises a purge of bureaucratic overstaffing and inefficiency.

He will "eradicate from our administration expensive and outmoded methods of working and unnecessary duplication of processes." He will "end the duplication of services in every region, the wasting of resources, the wasting of expertise, and the weakening of the union through fragmentation." Bayliss's attack on duplication and fragmentation is actually code for: centralisation under the supreme control of the General Secretary.

**GAIL CARTMAIL**

**A** second right-wing candidate is Gail Cartmail, who describes herself as the "independent progressive candidate". She stresses that she is not backed by any of the factions in the union and can therefore unite the membership. Cartmail presents herself as the tree-huggers' candidate:

"What our union doesn't need is more infighting between the same political factions that have failed to bring the different sectors of Unite together. Sectarianism and division is not in our members' interests, and a win for one of the factions will lead to more exclusion and a widening of rifts."

Cartmail does not mince her words either: "You look at some of those people (i.e. the other candidates and their supporters) and it's like a scene from Reservoir Dogs." The other candidates, she says, are representative of a "white, male, pale and stale" culture.

Cartmail wants to usher in a new culture in which talent can flourish and progress to dizzying heights: "Unite needs to develop a cadre of diverse activists who can be groomed to take leadership positions, not just within the union, but as councillors and parliamentary candidates too."

In other words, Unite should become a more efficient transmission belt for labour movement/Labour Party careerists.

With candidates like Cartmail and, even more so, Bayliss, this is not an election which the left in Unite can afford to sit out even if neither of the left candidates inspire a great deal of confidence.

**LEN MCCLUSKEY**

**T**he main left candidate for the General Secretary's position is Len McCluskey. Despite our criticisms of his record as Unite Assistant General Secretary, and despite the limitations of his election manifesto, the AWL is calling for a vote for McCluskey.

McCluskey pledges to make Unite a democratic union, with members having the decisive say in how it

conducts itself; a fighting union, which stands up for its members; an organising union, which reaches out to the unorganised; and a tolerant and inclusive union in which bullying no longer has a role to play.

In response to what he has rightly called "the class war which has been declared against the trade unions by the new government and employers," McCluskey has declared that "now is not the time to batten down the hatches but to rise like lions!" It is "only organised labour which can defend jobs," despite the threat of yet more anti-union laws:

"In the depths of a capitalist crisis, working people are to be denied any prospect of resisting. The trade union movement will not see these threats off simply by lobbying, necessary though that is."

"We have to be prepared to demonstrate, protest and take industrial action where necessary to make it clear that we are not going to be the scapegoats for the bankers' crisis, and to say that defending union rights is the same thing as defending working people's living standards."

In campaign meetings McCluskey has also spoken of the need to win back the Labour Party from the Blairites and Brownites: Unite members should join the party as individuals, and also secure delegations to local Constituency Labour Parties from their Unite branches.

McCluskey says the right things about the need to take on the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition's offensive against the working class, the centrality of the trade union movement to the fightback, the use of industrial action, and the need to challenge Blairite-Brownite control of the Labour Party.

But there is a gap between what McCluskey says and what he actually does.

If McCluskey wants a democratic union it needs to involve the election of union officials (being paid roughly what the members whom they represent are paid), and the right of Unite branches to communicate with one another. Yet he has not mentioned electing, rather than appointing, union officials, nor of the right to inter-branch communication.

Time and time again Unite has failed to back up its members who find themselves under attack from their employers, and has allowed itself to be intimidated by the Tories' anti-union laws. And McCluskey has been party to those failures. Reading McCluskey's campaigning material right now, you would not even be aware of the BA dispute!

McCluskey wants an organising union which reaches out to the unorganised? But when Vestas workers on the Isle of Wight, some of whom were already Unite members, occupied their workplace last year to save jobs, Unite took a conscious decision not to recruit the rest of the workforce, leaving them to be recruited by the RMT.

And in the last Labour Party leadership contest and also in the current one McCluskey refused to support the candidate (John McDonnell) who represented the only serious challenge to the Labour right. Again, reading McCluskey's campaigning material, you would not know that a Labour Party leadership contest was underway!

Calling for a vote for McCluskey does not mean relying on McCluskey to deliver what he says he stands for. McCluskey has not done it, in his capacity as Assistant General Secretary. There is no reason to suppose he would deliver in the role of General Secretary.

Campaigning for a vote for McCluskey needs to be linked to discussion about what needs to be done to turn the generalities in his election manifesto into reality. The election campaign needs to be part of a much broader campaign among the union's rank-and-file members aimed at transforming Unite into a fighting union.

That discussion needs to be taken up in the United Left, the main force in Unite behind McCluskey in the election. The United Left varies from region to region but it tends towards being an old-style Broad Left which focuses disproportionately (but not exclusively) on union-internal elections.

**JERRY HICKS**

**A**nother Unite member to put his name forward for nomination is Jerry Hicks. Much, but not all,

of the criticism of Hicks from others on the left in Unite is wide of the mark.

Until being victimised and sacked for his trade union activities, Hicks was a convenor in the Rolls Royce Bristol plant. He commanded sufficient respect among members that they took unofficial strike action against his dismissal. After failing to win re-instatement — with the Amicus apparatus doing nothing to help him — Hicks turned down a job with Amicus on the grounds that all officials should be elected.

Individual elements in Hicks' election platform place him well to the left of McCluskey — for example, the election of all union full-timers, re-nationalisation of the privatised industries, defiance of the anti-union laws.

But the positive aspects of Hicks as an individual and of some of his election policies are outweighed by a number of negatives.

Hicks condemns the Tory anti-union laws which saw Unite being dragged into the High Court because of alleged balloting technicalities over BA. But the same anti-union laws created the post of Trade Union Certification Officer. And it was Hicks who dragged Amicus in front of the Certification Officer in 2009 in order to trigger an election for the post of Amicus General Secretary.

Hicks wants to return ownership of the union to its members. At the same time he makes great play of opposing the removal of retired members from branch officer positions: "Retired members should have full and equal rights in the union's structures." This is not a quirk but opportunism. A disproportionately large number of votes cast in Unite elections are cast by retired members.

Hicks also plays to (a section of) the gallery with his (legitimate) attacks on the money which Unite hands over to the Labour Party without getting anything in return. Hicks calls for a "fundamental change" in Unite's "relationship with the Labour Party", but does not spell out what that change is. The fact that Hicks backs continued affiliation to the Labour Party is not in his election material!

Hicks says that, if elected, he will take only a workers' wage. But his commitment to elected representatives taking only a workers' wage seems somewhat selective. As a member of "Respect" he happily cohabits with George Galloway, who boasts of not being able to survive on three workers wages. Hicks backs the election of all Unite full-timers, but does not advocate a workers' wage for any other Unite officials.

Hicks has not launched any new rank-and-file group in Unite which could campaign for the kind of policies which he advocates. Yet he has cut himself off from the United Left. It was his theatricals at the meeting held earlier this year to select the United Left candidate for the General Secretary's election which resulted in a perception of him as a maverick who does not deserve to be taken seriously.

Hicks' decision to stand (assuming that he, like the others, secures the required number of nominations) also raises the question of a split in the left vote. Is McCluskey so bad (by left standards) and Hicks so good (by the same standards) that the risk of Bayliss winning the election by "coming up through the middle" is not a relevant consideration?

In truth McCluskey is not so bad nor Hicks so good that the risk of a split in the left vote which paves the way for a Bayliss victory can be ignored. This consideration might not be decisive but it is important.

Activists in Unite need to organise for more than just a cross in a box against McCluskey's name. Unite activists — and that includes Hicks and his supporters — need to use the election campaign as a springboard to push through the radical changes which are needed to transform Unite into a genuinely rank-and-file controlled organisation.

The Tory/Lib-Dems declaration of class war lends an added urgency to this task. The biggest union in Britain needs to be fit for purpose if it is to take on the coalition government and fight for a Labour government accountable to the working class.

Campaigning for a vote for McCluskey should not be an end in itself but a lever which opens up the prospect of making both the United Left and Unite itself fit for purpose.



## GERMANY

# “A perfect time for a working-class offensive”

Wladek Flakin, of German section of the Revolutionary Internationalist Organisation, discusses opportunities and obstacles facing the German working class with Daniel Randall of Workers' Liberty.

## What austerity measures does the government plan?

They plan to cut €80 billion from the federal budget over the next 10 years. The cuts effect different sections of the working class in different ways. There are supposed to be 15,000 job cuts in the federal bureaucracy, combined with a wage freeze. There are also massive attacks on unemployed people: unemployed workers will no longer be eligible for “parents’ money”. The government will no longer pay retirement contributions for long-term unemployed people.

Industrial workers have not been the main focus of the attacks so far. Party that’s because they were already subject to substantial attacks under the last Social Democratic government (up to 2005). The SPD raised the retirement age from 65 to 67. They also massively expanded the number of precarious jobs. The

## IN BRIEF: IRAQ, GREECE

**Iraq:** Police raided and shut down electricity unions across Iraq in mid-July, carrying out an order from the Minister of Electricity that could have been lifted from Saddam Hussein’s rule book.

The order prohibits “all trade union activities at the ministry and its departments and sites” and authorises the police “to close all trade union offices and bases and to take control of unions’ assets properties and documents, furniture and computers.”

The leader of Britain’s Trades Union Congress has called upon the Iraqi government “to withdraw the order, and allow unions to operate freely, underpinned by a fair, just and International Labour Organisation-compliant labour law.”

The Iraqi trade union movement is calling on trade union members everywhere to raise their voices in protest.

- Send a protest to the Iraqi government. Go to the Labour Start website: <http://www.labourstart.org>

**Greece:** workers staged another 24-hour general strike on 8 July, timing it to coincide with a parliamentary vote on pension cuts.

According to one activist in Thessaloniki: “The real battles lie ahead of us in September when Greek politics traditionally revive after the lethargy of a long, hot summer.

“The effects of the first wave of cuts in wages, rising unemployment and the fall in income from tourism are likely to combine to form a perfect political storm.

“It is hard to see how [prime minister George] Papandreou is going to maintain party discipline among Pasok backbenchers already deeply upset about the route the party is taking.

“The party base [Pasok is the rough Greek equivalent of the Labour Party] is unhappy with being identified with such wildly unpopular policies”.

Opinion-poll evidence from Greece suggests a volatile situation.

Just 18% of Greeks believe that the country is on the right track, (down from 38% in February).

Although “how would you vote if there were an election tomorrow” results suggest Pasok could get re-elected (43% for Pasok, 25% for the big right-wing opposition party New Democracy), positive approval ratings for Pasok and New Democracy are down to 18% and 9% respectively.

The biggest leftish parties in Greece, the Stalinist Greek Communist Party and the left social democratic Syriza, are on 10% and 6% respectively but polls also show wide support for the general idea of a “new left party” of some sort.

Meanwhile, unions and bosses have negotiated a deal to freeze private sector wages for 2010 and increase pay in 2011 by just 1.5 percent from 1 July 2011 and by 1.7 percent from 1 July 2012. The minimum wage in the private sector wage will be raised to 751 euros a month next year and 763 euros in 2012.

## Government in crisis

current government is hoping, though, that its attacks will create pressure on industrial workers by increasing fear of unemployment.

There are also planned cuts in military spending. Germany still has compulsory national service, but this unpopular and doesn’t really fit in with the interests of German imperialism — the military can’t do much with all the people who do the service for a year, such as send them to Afghanistan.

A number of bourgeois commentators have expressed their surprise that the Social Democratic Party (SPD) haven’t shifted to the left in opposition. They’re not opposed to the cuts, they’re just saying they need to be socially balanced. They’re calling for increase of 2 percentage points in the highest tax bracket — as an addition rather than as an alternative to the cuts. The governing conservatives came under pressure on this because Germany’s dominant ideology is “social partnership” — the whole of society, rich and poor, bosses and workers, should share the burden for paying for the crisis. However, the conservatives’ coalition partner, the hyper-liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), is firmly opposed to any tax increases for the rich.

## What’s the state of the labour movement and the left?

The trade union leaderships are tied to the SPD. Historically the German trade union movement has been very dominated by large apparatuses. There are some leftish elements in the lower strata of the bureaucracy, and they generally have a more combative position.

The biggest force to the left of the SPD is the Left Party. This was founded in 2005 as a fusion of the old East German [Stalinist] ruling party, the PDS, and the WASG, which was a leftish split from the SPD based mainly on low-level trade union bureaucrats.

The East German base of the Left Party is made up of pensioners and local politicians. In West Germany its base is more in the trade union bureaucracy.

Their latest draft programme is fairly radical but in practice the party is involved in two provincial governments which are carrying out massive social cuts.

No one is fighting for the perspective of a workers’ government, even from the revolutionary left; both the SAV (Committee for a Workers International — Socialist Party in UK) and the Marx21 (loosely affiliated to the International Socialist Tendency — Socialist Workers Party in UK) sections in Germany participate in the Left Party.

Marx21 leads the Left Party’s student group and the SAV focuses on oppositional work in their youth organisation. The IST acts as a pressure group within the Left Party and isn’t visible as an organisation. They’ve been rewarded for their loyalty to the party leadership with all sorts of posts: for example there are two ISTers in the German parliament! The CWI, on the other hand, is genuinely oppositional and has been the victim of witch-hunts and defamation. However, their perspective is limited to calling on the Left Party to be a “fighting party of workers and youth” rather than a revolutionary socialist party.

On 12 June there were demonstrations in Berlin and Stuttgart under the slogan “We won’t pay for your crisis!” These were organised by an alliance initiated by elements of the radical left and some elements of the trade union bureaucracy. Cuts announcements bolstered numbers. National trade unions and the Left Party jumped on board, which helped build the demos but they were very dominated by the bureaucracy. These elements certainly aren’t universally popular, though — at the Stuttgart demo an SPD speaker was

egged!

There’s no alternative strategy coming from any significant part of the labour movement. The revolutionary left is very weak and isolated.

The autonomist movement is still one of the most important sections of the far-left. Some of them are becoming more oriented towards workers’ struggles, but they’re more interested in influencing the left-wing sectors of the bureaucracy, than developing rank-and-file organisation.

The Trotskyist left in Germany has historically always been very weak. Of the small number of Trotskyists in Germany in 1933, less than half survived fascism and only a handful returned to activism. When the movement was being rebuilt after the war, there were only one or two cadres who had experience from before fascism. The Trotskyist left has never really recovered.

Now, the biggest Trotskyist groups are all focused on the Left Party. It’s a shame, because that’s reduced the visibility of Trotskyists as independent revolutionaries.

## Has the left focused much on the “eurozone” aspect of the crisis? Have their been any calls for Germany to quit the eurozone or the EU?

In relation to the Greek crisis there was a lot of chauvinist propaganda referring to the “garlic zone” of the EU where everyone is lazy and workshy. The tabloid press was dreaming about a return of the Deutschmark so Germany wouldn’t have to pay for the “lazy Greeks”. But that was never seriously considered by the ruling class.

Our view is that the EU is an imperialist bloc designed to help European capital compete more effectively with its rivals. But individual European imperialisms are no better, so we think calls for a withdrawal from the EU (as are raised by sections of the Greek left) by themselves are dead-ends.

The bigger problem on the German left is the mystification of the EU as some kind of progressive historical project designed to unite people and make wars impossible. While the freer movement of people within Europe is positive, it’s tangential to the EU project — it’s a by-product rather than a direct intention.

## What are the next steps?

The government has been in crisis for at least the last month; the parties within the coalition have been rabidly attacking each other.

Post-war Germany has been based on social partnership which has involved a very high level of integration of the trade union bureaucracies into the state and individual corporations. That costs the ruling-class a lot in terms of making at least cosmetic concessions to the workers’ movement, and it takes a long time to implement things like cuts because everything has to be mediated.

A minority in the ruling class is getting tired of this; they want to break up that relationship and give themselves more of a free hand. They’re represented by the FDP, but the reality is that the only speak for a minority of the ruling class. The bourgeois press (such as the business newspaper *Handelsblatt*) is very critical of them.

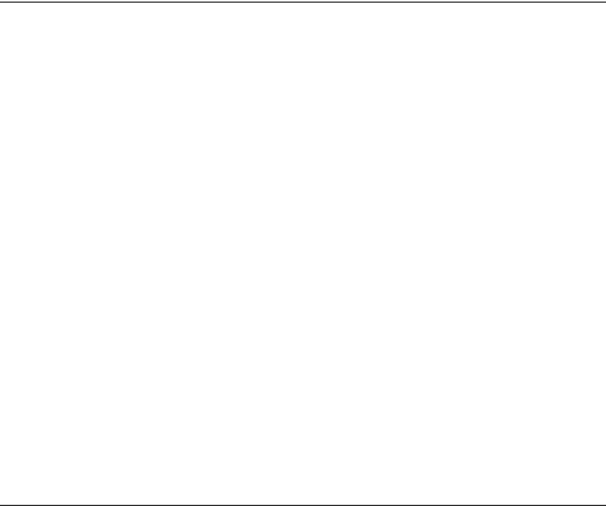
In many ways this is a perfect time for a working-class offensive. We need to raise the slogan that workers shouldn’t pay for the capitalist crisis. There have been some significant struggles recently, including actions against mass lay-offs at Opel factories and wild-cat strikes last winter at Daimler plants near Stuttgart. There have also been big education strikes which have brought hundreds of thousands of school and university students out onto the streets.

But for any of this to lead anywhere, we need to create a revolutionary current in the working-class movement. That means orienting to the labour movement but also fighting within the student movement, for example, for a clear orientation towards the working class. This has got to be a rank-and-file orientation — orienting to the trade union apparatus will only lead to radical left activists being co-opted.

Illusions still exist in the SPD and the Left Party; the revolutionary left needs to relate to these parties in terms of putting pressure on them to act in the interests of workers. We don’t think there are too much opportunities for revolutionary entry work in either the SPD or the Left Party but it is necessary to have a certain engagement with the workers who believe in them.

BLACK PEOPLE IN USA

Inequality rising, workers’ solidarity needed



Dan Katz looks at the impact of the economic crisis on black people in the USA and the political response of the Obama administration.

The terrible legacy of slavery, and the Jim Crow segregation which followed, still weighs heavily on black America.

In June 2010 the Equal Justice Initiative issued a report on racial discrimination in US jury selection. 135 years after the 1875 Civil Rights Act was supposed to eliminate such practices the EJI found:

“Prosecutors have struck African Americans from jury service because they appeared to have ‘low intelligence,’ wore eyeglasses, walked in a certain way [or] dyed their hair... Some district attorney’s offices explicitly train prosecutors to exclude racial minorities from jury service and teach them how to mask racial bias...”

“In some communities, the exclusion of African Americans from juries is extreme. For example, in Houston County, Alabama, eight out of 10 African Americans qualified for jury service have been struck by prosecutors from death penalty cases. In Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, there is no effective African American representation on the jury in 80 percent of criminal trials.”

Elsewhere in the US justice system staggering inequality continues. Over 2.3 million Americans are behind bars; if those on parole or probation are included, one in 31 of all Americans are under “correctional supervision”. America is well ahead — both in absolute numbers, and in percentage of the population — of all other countries in its willingness to jail its citizens. However one in nine black men aged 20-34 are in jail. For black women aged 35-39, the figure is one in 100, compared with one in 355 for white women in the same age group (2008, Pew Centre report).

**OVERVIEW**

In 2008 the black population of the United States stood at 41 million, or 13.5% of the population. Black Americans have an average life expectancy of 73.3 years, five years lower than white Americans. Black men have a life expectancy of 69.8 years, slightly less than in Nicaragua and Morocco (Fox News report, 2007).

By almost all social and economic indicators African Americans suffer very serious consequences from systematic discrimination. For example:

- In 2007, a lower percentage of black people had earned at least a high school diploma (80% against a figure of 89% for white people). More black women than black men had earned at least a degree-level qualification (16% against 14% for black men), while among non-Hispanic whites, a higher proportion of men than women had earned at least a university-level degree (25% and 24%, respectively).
- According to the 2007 US Census Bureau report, the average African American family median income was \$33,916 in comparison to \$54,920 for non-Hispanic white families.
- In 2007, the US Census Bureau reported that 24.5% of African Americans compared to 8.2% of non-Hispanic white people were living below the poverty level.
- In 2007, the unemployment rate for black people was twice that for non-Hispanic whites (8% and 4%, respectively).
- In 2007, 49% of African Americans in comparison to 66% of non-Hispanic whites used employer-sponsored

health insurance. 24% of African Americans in comparison to 9% of non-Hispanic whites relied on public health insurance. 20% of African Americans in comparison to 10% of non-Hispanic whites were uninsured (Office of Minority Health).

- In 2005, African Americans had 2.3 times the infant mortality rate of non-Hispanic whites. African Americans accounted for 49% of HIV/AIDS cases in 2007. In 2005, African American women were 10% less likely to have been diagnosed with breast cancer, however, they were 34% more likely to die from breast cancer, compared to non-Hispanic white women. In 2005, African American men were 30% more likely to die from heart disease, as compared to non-Hispanic white men.

**JOBS AND POVERTY NOW**

The impact of the economic crisis of the last two years is widening the gap between black and white.

“In the late 1950s, the poverty rate for all Americans was 22.4%, or nearly 40 million people. These numbers declined steadily throughout the 1960s, reaching a low of 11%, or 23 million people, in 1973. The poverty rate began to rise steadily again in 1980 [following Ronald Reagan’s Republican election victory]. By 1983, the number of poor individuals had risen to 35.3 million individuals, or 15.2%.

“In 2008, 13.2% of all persons lived in poverty [government figures calculated on the basis of a “poverty threshold” issued annually by the US Census Bureau].

“Poverty rates for black people and Hispanics greatly exceed the national average. In 2008, 24.7% of blacks and 23.2% of Hispanics were [officially] poor, compared to 8.6% of non-Hispanic whites... And 4.2 million black children, or 34% of all black children live in poverty” (University of Michigan, Poverty Centre).

At the start of the recession (at end of 2007), the unemployment rate for African Americans was 8.6%. In the two years that followed, the unemployment rate rose to 15.8%. (The rate also increased for Hispanics, from 5.8% in December 2007 to 12.9% in December 2009). The unemployment rate for white Americans was 9.2% at the end of 2009 (this rate had more than doubled over two years).

The US’s highest unemployment rate is 28% in Detroit, a city which is 83% black. The mainly black south and west Sides of Chicago are the second highest with 22%.

The number of employed people in the US labour force also fell sharply in 2009. African American employment levels are now falling at nearly 4% annually. (Asian Americans and whites saw the number of employed fall by 2.7%, while Hispanic employment levels declined by 2.3% annually).

Despite employment gains from 2001 to 2007, at the same time all groups saw a decline in employment-to-population ratio. African Americans’ share dropped 0.4 percentage points annually (more than other groups). Employment gains made during economic growth did not keep pace with population growth.

That rate of decline has dramatically increased since 2007.

As of the third quarter of 2009, Hispanics and African Americans continued to make far less per week than whites or Asian Americans. In the third quarter of 2009, Hispanics’ median weekly earnings were \$527.13; African Americans’ earnings were \$608.33 a week; whites made \$753.19 a week; Asian Americans made \$877.22 a week.

African Americans continued to have the lowest median household income: \$34,345 (2008 dollars). Hispanics’ median household income was \$37,913. White Americans had a median income of \$55,530 (US Bureau of the Census).

In 2008 less than half of African Americans — 45.6% — had access to employer-based retirement savings, down 1.5 percentage points from 2007. Whites also saw a decline, with only 56.6% having employer-based retirement plans, down one percentage point from the year before.

The rate of homeownership also declined in 2009, and large disparities continued. The homeownership rate was 46.4% for African Americans in the third quarter of 2009, 48.7% for Hispanics, and 75% for white Americans (Bureau of the Census).

OBAMA’S ELECTION

The increase in the number of black voters between the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections was about 2.1 million, rising to 16.1 million. And there was a 55% turnout rate in 2008 election from 18- to 24-year-old black people, an 8% increase from 2004.

95% of black voters voted for Obama. However not only has Obama presided over a great general increase in US poverty, unemployment and cuts, but the first black President has also studiously avoided developing any “black agenda” to deal with the disproportionate effects of the crisis on African Americans. His political outriders even argue that black voters who demand positive action for black communities should not expect it — as such action would not be demanded from a white President.

A group of pseudo black radicals, led by Al Sharpton, helped Barack Obama. These “community leaders” now have access to the White House and are worried about losing their backstairs route to influence. In as much as people like Sharpton represent any interests but their own, they rest on a layer of US black people who are now doing relatively well from US capitalism.

Obama is worried about being seen as a black President, rather than a President who happens to be black. Since the struggle to get his healthcare reforms through he has been increasingly harassed by the Republican Party and the right-wing, grassroots Tea Party movement. The Tea Party stands for cuts in state spending and taxes; some of its members have used explicitly racist language when attacking Obama. At the end of July Mark Williams was expelled from the movement for writing a “satirical letter” in which black slavery is described as a “great gig”.

Nevertheless (and despite continuing high approval ratings among black voters) Obama is preparing a backlash for himself. The impact of the crisis in the US looks set to get worse for American workers as a whole, and US black workers in particular.

Even if he wanted to, Obama will have less room to act in the future; the highpoint of his presidency has long-gone. Obama’s political position will almost certainly weaken following elections later this year and his opinion poll ratings have fallen below 50%.

Moreover, in the last year the political consensus in the US has shifted sharply against those like Obama who favour pumping money into the economy, in favour of those who back austerity and cuts. At national level the Republicans have successfully attacked Obama’s most recent stimulus package (including refusing to extend emergency unemployment benefit funding, affecting 2.5 million workers). At state level, where most states have some sort of balanced-budget law, the situation has been bad for two years and is set to get worse as federal stimulus money dries up. At least 45 states have made serious cuts in services; 30 have raised taxes.

**OBAMA AND THE WORKERS’ MOVEMENT**

The left is not an advisor to Obama — his administration is not left wing, nor is it sympathetic to the interests of workers, black or white. Our job is not to create a “black agenda” — at least not in the conventional sense. We want to see a workers’ movement in the US which will fight for working class interests, within which racism and the effects of discrimination are recognised and fought.

The US working class — as a whole — is being battered. The *Economist* (24 July) sums up the effects of the crisis on the US working class in this way: “More than half of all workers have experienced a spell of unemployment, taken a cut in pay or hours or been forced to go part-time. The typical unemployed worker has been jobless for nearly six months. Collapsing share and house prices have destroyed a fifth of the wealth of the average household. Nearly six in ten Americans have cancelled or cut back on holidays. About a fifth say their mortgages are underwater. One in four of those between 18 and 29 have moved back in with parents. Fewer than half of all adults expect their children to have a higher standard of living than theirs, and more than a quarter say it will be lower.”

Black and white US workers face a stark choice: either they unite to fight these cuts or suffer the consequences. We remain: for workers’ solidarity, and an uncompromising fight against racism and for equality.



## PRIVATE PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS

# Making a killing from the cuts

By **DARREN BEDFORD**

**T**his government, made up of parties with an historical, ideological commitment to the rule of markets has come to power against the backdrop of an economic crisis. They will make cuts and it is inevitable that they will try to expand public sector privatisation and outsourcing under the cover of this crisis.

Contracting out provision of public services — waste management, housing or education, for example — is an easy way to cut without seeming to cut and to absolve central or local government of responsibility for the quality of service or the working conditions of those who provide those services.

Several giant multinationals already operate in Britain as significant providers of outsourced public services. We profile some of them here to help working-class activists get to know a group of enemies that are only going to get bigger.

### **CAPITA GROUP**

This is the big daddy in the field. Capita does everything. Its field is “business process outsourcing”, which basically means “need something doing? Pay us to do it for you.” Except it’s not talking about your dishes or hoovering the carpet. It’s talking about multi-million pound contracts to run various parts of the public sector.

The Education Maintenance Allowance (the derisory £30 a week “grant” for 16-19 year olds in full time education) is not administered by the government, but by Capita Group. The contract it won from the now defunct Learning & Skills Council is just one of several such contracts. And it’s only set to get bigger. Quoted in the *Guardian*, Capita boss Richard Marchant said: “A major problem for the public sector is, we feel, a significant opportunity for us. Opportunities are at their highest level in two to three years. This year we have probably seen a 100% increase in opportunities [compared with 2009] and I suspect we will see another 50% increase in the following year.”

So there you have it, folks. Big public sector present huge opportunities for companies like Capita. The *Guardian* estimates a £60m boost for Capita’s revenues as a result of increased outsourcing. We take cuts, they make money. And they make money even when they prove incompetent: when they took over running CRB

**Top to bottom: advert for Capita IT, Serco security and Sodexho food voucher.  
All working for you? We think not**

checks in 2002, thousands of teachers were kept out of work for weeks as Capita’s systems failed to keep up with the workload.

### **SERCO**

Serco Group PLC is a service-provision behemoth, employing 70,000 people directly and operating with a revenue of over £3 billion in 2009. The *Guardian* referred to it as “the biggest company you’ve never heard of”. The pies in which Serco has a big fat profiteering finger are innumerable. Ever taken a DLR train in London? A Merseyrail train in Liverpool? Been clocked by a speed camera? Attended school in Bradford, Walsall or Stoke? All money in Serco’s pocket. It manages several Local Education Authorities, a range of transport services, leisure centres and the IT facilities of a London

borough as well as having a substantial defence portfolio. Like many companies of its type it has also expanded into the detention “sector”, running four prisons and two “Immigration Removal Centres”, including the infamous Yarl’s Wood centre.

The nature of Serco’s relationship to the local government bodies for whom it provides services gives an insight into how, even when you think a public service is still public, it might actually be privatised. Its 10-year, £360 million contract with Bradford Council allowed it to provide “education support services” to the council; their joint “division of responsibilities” document shows that Serco has sole or lead responsibility for vital services in the schools sector, including libraries, ICT, inclusion, testing, and headteacher employment. Three years into Serco’s stewardship of schools in Bradford, 5% of them were in special measures. Fortunately, Serco’s contract will not be renewed when it expires in 2011.

### **SODEXHO**

France-based multinational Sodexho is one of the world’s biggest food and facilities management companies, with an operating income of nearly 750 million euros in 2009.

Sodexho’s main line of business is providing food services in a range of public sector institutions including schools, colleges and hospitals. But its poor quality of service and atrocious workers’ rights record have seen it become the target of several industrial disputes and boycott campaigns that have, in some cases, threatened its contracts.

According to Sodexho’s own propaganda, 75 of the FTSE 100 “rely” on them to provide “cost-effective solutions to their employee or hospitality catering, or to deliver support services including cleaning, reception, switchboard and help desks, mailroom, reprographics and grounds maintenance.”

In spring 2010, there was a mini-strike wave among Sodexho employees in America in response to low pay, poor healthcare options and management bullying. Like retail giant Wal-Mart, it has been exposed issuing its managers with direct training and materials on how to “deal with” (ie, smash up) workers’ organisation. It is currently the UK’s leading contractor for catering services for local authorities and NHS trusts.

*Continues on page 2*

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